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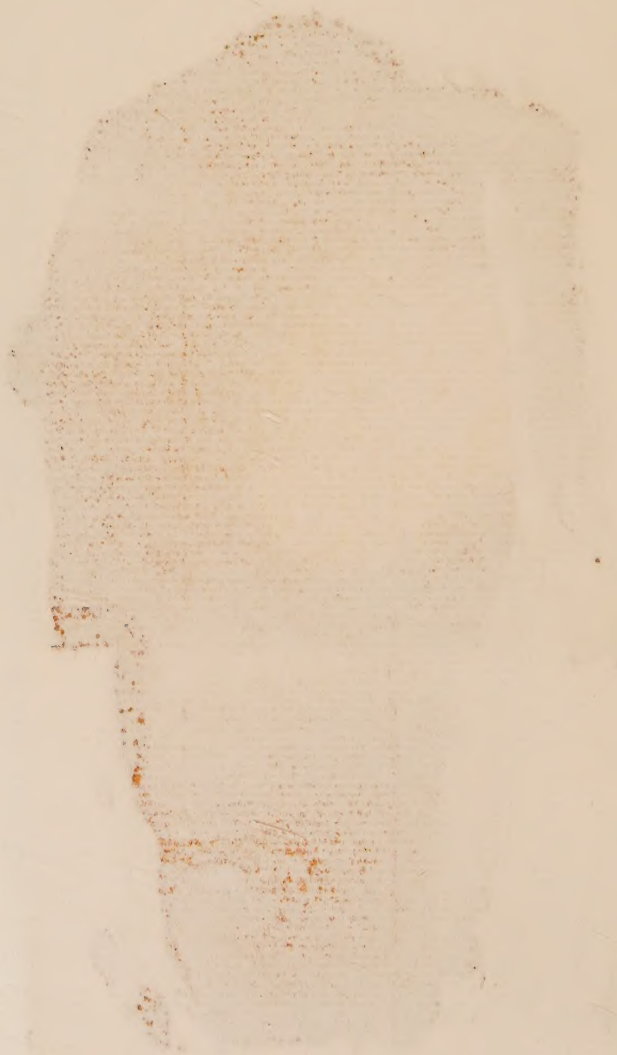
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ANGOLA : AN EASTERN TALE



XVIII CENTURY  
FRENCH ROMANCES

*Edited by*  
VYVYAN HOLLAND

I  
THE FAIRY DOLL

[LA POUPÉE]

*Translated from the French of* JEAN-GALLI DE  
BIBIENA *by* H.B.V., *with an Introduction by*  
SHANE LESLIE

II  
THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

[LA NUIT ET LE MOMENT]

*Translated from the French of* M. DE CRÉBILLON  
LE FILS *by* ERIC SUTTON, *with an Introduction*  
*by* ALDOUS HUXLEY

III  
THE QUEEN OF GOLCONDA  
AND OTHER TALES

*Translated from the French of* STANISLAS-JEAN  
DE BOUFFLERS *by* ERIC SUTTON, *with an*  
*Introduction by* HUGH WALPOLE

# ANGOLA : AN EASTERN TALE

BY

JACQUES-ROCHETTE de La MORLIÈRE

TRANSLATED BY

H. B. V.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

AUGUSTUS JOHN



. . . *Non, si turbida Roma  
Elevet, accedas : Examenve improbum in illâ  
Castiges trutinâ.*—Persius, Sat. I. 5.

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

*'Angola,' by the Chevalier J.-R. de La Morlière, was first published in Paris under the rubric 'À Agra' in 1746. It was frequently reprinted in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The present translation is made from the text of an edition of 1751.*

H. B. V.



## INTRODUCTION

### I

*La Morlière, whose name has survived entirely owing to the popularity of his 'Angola', of which the present book is a translation, spent a life of violence and adventure almost unequalled even in eighteenth-century France. A modern French critic has described him as 'mousquetaire, puis homme de lettres, chef de claue et pilier de café', a description which admirably sums up his character and his life.*

*Jacques-Rochette de la Morlière was born on April 22nd, 1719, at Grenoble. His parents were both of noble birth, and his father held the position of magistrate in that city.*

*According to family tradition, La Morlière was destined for the law, but he never took his legal studies seriously and never had any intention of following a sedentary occupation: even as a boy he lived the most hilarious life, and was the leader in a series of escapades which caused serious annoyance to the honest inhabitants of Grenoble, both in their capacity of burgesses and in that of husbands. So much so that, at last, after having with commendable discernment utterly compromised the wife of a tax-collector, he had to disappear in order to avoid prosecution.*

*His father sent him to Paris, where he joined the Corps*



of Musketeers. His uniform and his sword increased his feeling of self-importance, and his mode of life was so scandalous, and he was mixed up in so many brawls, that he was expelled from that not too hypercritical body of men.

His father, naturally terrified at what his son would do next, sent for him to return to Grenoble. But this was not La Morlière's idea at all. He remained in Paris, and became a confirmed idler entirely devoted to the pursuit of mischief. With the death of his mother he had inherited a small patrimony which he very soon exhausted, and one day he awoke to find himself quite penniless. However, he continued his swashbuckling ways and lived for some time more or less reputably upon his wits.

It was at this period that he first turned his mind to literature, and in 1745 he produced a book called '*Le Siège de Tournay*', of no particular interest, to be followed a year later by his masterpiece, '*Angola*.' This book was immensely popular, and brought La Morlière a short period of fame and prosperity. He made the mistake, however, of trying to surpass '*Angola*', and in 1747 he published '*Les Lauriers ecclésiastiques, ou les Campagnes de l'Abbé de T\*\*\**', in which he over-reached himself. This book was a scurrilous attack on the Abbé Terray, and pretended to be a record of his youthful indiscretions. Once more the shadow of the law began to creep towards La Morlière, and he fled incontinently to Rouen to avoid arrest.

*At Rouen he adopted the title of a German baron and continued his wild career. Under cover of his incognito, he made love to the daughter of a local Parliamentary Councillor. He thoroughly compromised her, and agreed to marry her. He then wrote an anonymous letter to her father, disclosing that he was none other than the notorious 'jeffé coquin de La Morlière', and had himself bought off by her father for thirty thousand francs. As ingenious and pretty a piece of blackmail as one could wish for, which enabled him to return to Paris, once more in funds, bolder and more debonair than ever.*

*Re-established in Paris, he managed to become the centre of a small literary circle, who constituted themselves a theatrical tribunal from which there was no appeal. If they decided that a play had merit, they applauded it and made it successful. If, however, they did not like it, they would employ every means in their power to make it a failure. Such was the power of La Morlière's clique that every one connected with the stage feared him, and tried to propitiate him, or at any rate to ascertain what his intentions were. So well was his clique organized that they often did not know what was required of them until after the piece began: their eyes would be fixed on him, not on the stage, and he would give them their cue as to the exact attitude they should adopt by his own gestures and movements.*

*La Morlière became such a power in the theatre that*

*the secret police were put on his track and began to hustle him in the theatre whenever he tried to show the slightest signs of disapproval: even this did not stop him entirely, and on one occasion he ruined a play entirely by yawning continuously. The contagion of his yawns spread through the whole audience and finally attacked the actors themselves! Shortly after this, however, he was expelled from the Théâtre Français and refused admittance for several months.*

*He then set up as a dramatic teacher, and is supposed to have instructed his young pupils in other arts not usually included in the curriculum of a dramatic school.*

*Unfortunately for La Morlière, he tried his own hand at writing plays. He had two produced, but they were so thoroughly badly received that he lost all credit as a dramatic critic and his claque completely broke up.*

*From this point La Morlière gradually sank lower and lower, and died poor, forgotten and neglected on February 8th, 1785, at the age of sixty-six.*

*Perhaps the most remarkable fact in La Morlière's life is that he only went to prison once, in 1762, and then only for four months.*

## II

*'Angola' is a satire on eighteenth-century manners and customs in Paris, and from the time it was published until 1785 it was one of the most popular boudoir books in*



*France, where its fame even spread to the provinces. Monsieur Charles Monselet, in 'Les Oubliés et Dédaignés', has written a most admirable appreciation of 'Angola', in which he says:*

*'It is only a novel of the very lightest kind, but the whole of the eighteenth century is contained in this story. The graceful little love affairs, the satire, the garden parties, the Opera, a corner of the Court are all described with a minute care which makes the paintings of Lancret and Baudoin unnecessary. Nowhere else can one find such a vivid description of the "petite maison" or of a fashionable garden of the period. The heroines are dressed, made-up and shod as though by an expert maid. The dandies are worthy of the coquettes: they are so real as they turn and mince, shake the powder from their hair, look at the time in at least two watches, and play with their rings, their quizzing-glasses and their snuff-boxes . . .'*

*It has sometimes been complained that the references are too obscure, and that notes should be given to tell one to whom the various passages refer. But 'Angola' does not profess to be a deeply historical record, and any attempt at doing this would take away from the wanton lightness of it all. Many of the references are so lightly veiled that hardly anyone can fail to understand them, and if the others remain obscure, well, what after all is a fairy story for except to create an atmosphere of mystery?*

*But apart from such difficulties there is not even an*

atmosphere of mystery in this narrative such as we are accustomed to expect in a fairy tale, even though the fairies and djinns do deal in magic charms and potions, and do travel ordinarily by air. These effects do not move us to wonder, for they are only intended for grown-ups and are not to be taken seriously.

Neither is there any room for pathos where the ridiculous reigns supreme, and no one, I think, who has not reached his second childhood will be constrained to rush from the room to hide his emotion at the trials of Angola as children used to do, and may still do for aught I know, over the adventures of the Snow Queen or the vicissitudes of the Darning Needle. Neither can we find any trace here of the enchanting folk-lore with which the brothers Grimm and our own nurses transfigured our childhood, and which only grew the more wonderful as we came to know it better.

In reality the only serious thing about this book is its flippancy—but that is profound. Unless, indeed, we can regard the conversation of the various lovers as serious, for from our point of view it must at any rate have meant serious effort and training. Few of us could hope to shine in this style of speech, and fewer still, I venture to say, could succeed by its means in eliciting a favourable response from the lips of our fair interlocutress, whether in the same idiom or not. But then we have so nearly reduced the art of conversation to a few pungent monosyllables,

*and those mostly slang, and in our more intimate moments we are apt to become distressingly inarticulate, and so can form no idea of the elaboration with which well-bred people pursued the art of pleasure and the science of love in an age when time was not altogether money.*

*However, although we in our taxi-cabs can no longer pretend to the highly wrought address of Angola and Aménis in their carriage, we can console ourselves with the reflection that our conduct at least is better and that our motives are higher, even if our manners are worse. Still, we may reasonably doubt whether even in the eighteenth century many people arrived à cette hauteur.*

*In the author's Short Preface we find what seems to be a perfect extract from the fashionable life of the period, and here the language is much more nearly within the bounds of our own comprehension, and is more what is called natural at least by those of us who are accustomed to visit the theatre. For me, this Preface is almost the best thing in the book, and I only wish that rascal La Morlière had seen fit to make it a little longer.*

AUGUSTUS JOHN

January 1926.



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## A SHORT PREFACE WILL NOW BE GIVEN

. . . *Quid rides? mutato nomine, de te  
Fabula narratur.*

HORACE, SAT. I. I.

A N elegant carriage drew up before the door of the Comtesse de S . . . : an exquisitely dressed young man stepped out of it and was ushered in, smoothing his finery.

‘Why! The curtains are drawn back!’ he exclaimed, as he entered the Comtesse’s apartment. ‘But have I been mistaken? Did you not pass the night at P . . . at that divine supper party to which I was bidden and which I am so furious at having missed?’

‘Well,’ said the Comtesse, ‘and if I did?’

‘Ah!’ said the Marquis, ‘I never dreamt I should find you up: I was presuming on the fatigues of the night before. I consider it base treachery on your part, and I think your energy very ill-timed. I had a thousand things to say to you, and in counting on being received at your bedside, I was prepared for our interview to be a most tender one. It is an unkind trick to have played me . . .’

‘How stupid you are!’ broke in the Comtesse, pouting. ‘Where did you get the idea, pray, that it

is wrong to be up at three in the afternoon? However, it is charming of you to pretend to be so upset by a matter which is probably one of complete indifference to you.'

'I live only to submit to your fancies,' continued the Marquis in a more serious tone. 'But evidently your charm is proof against late nights and the most endless of fashionable suppers. You are as fresh as a pious spinster after a long night's rest . . .'

'Oh, but please don't think that!' said the Comtesse. 'I have not felt at all myself for several days: I have been suffering from a fit of depression which really alarms me.'

'The idea!' replied the Marquis. 'You are actually looking your very best and you inspire me with thoughts . . . By the way, madame, may I hope to discover your object in imputing such complete indifference to me about everything that concerns you? I am amazed at it, personally, as I thought you were fully aware of the ardour of my feelings for you, and it seemed to me only logical that we should behave according to their dictates.'

'Well, upon my word!' interrupted the Comtesse. 'What an atrocious idea! I know quite well that President de M . . .'s little wife has enslaved you: you are always with her; you have taken her to the ballet at Versailles; you have been seen



together at the Théâtre Français and at the Théâtre Italien, and I imagine you are going to clinch the position by showing yourself with her at the State Ball. Nothing in the world is so notorious as an affair of this kind, and I am deeply hurt that you should have thought of using me as a foil.'

'But,' said the Marquis, 'these charges are so strange that they baffle me. How can you be caught with such obvious chaff? It is true that I appeared to have taken up the little de M . . . , but it was only to make myself pleasant to her husband, who is concerned in a case of mine, and to whom I could render no more acceptable service than that of relieving him of his wife; nothing, I assure you, could be more innocent than our acquaintance-ship, whereas you have the most imperative claims upon my heart . . . Your neck and shoulders are really quite marvellous.'

'Do be quiet, Marquis,' said the Comtesse some minutes later, 'you are becoming perfectly absurd.'

'Far from it, madame,' he replied, continuing his scrutiny; 'I am, I assure you, the most respectful man in France . . . What divine beauty,' he added, allowing his attention to wander more and more, and even trying to verify his impressions.

'Oh! As for that,' said the Comtesse, suddenly remembering herself, 'it exasperates me to see you

indulging in such indiscreet dalliance. Keep that for your President's wife, and spare yourself the trouble of feigning an ardour which you would be hard put to it to justify, were I so foolish as to humour it.'

'Madame,' eagerly replied the Marquis, 'were I in such case, you less than anyone else could be my excuse for it. But, thank heavens, my reputation in that respect is flawless; and were I fortunate enough for you to wish to ascertain whether I am boasting unjustifiably . . .'

'Oh, you speak to me about fortune,' interrupted the Comtesse, 'and you talk in such a rigmarole that I am afraid I do not understand half you say.'

'Ah!' said the Marquis. 'What lovely ornaments you have on your mantelpiece: those Chinese cabinets are charming. Do they come from the shop in the Rue de la Roule? Personally, I am crazy about that man: everything he sells is so rare and so expensive . . .'

'Yes,' said the Comtesse, 'I certainly think they have been chosen with taste.'

'Why,' said the Marquis, 'they are in divine taste. The grotesques are wonderfully modelled, particularly this one: it is as like your dolt of a husband as one pea is to another.'

‘Ah, be quiet!’ said the Comtesse; let us respect his memory: I am trying to get something from him, so I have been with him a great deal lately. I have sulked and had the vapours and even pretended pregnancy; at last I think I have earned a carriage and six cream-coloured horses, about which I am so excited that I can hardly eat or drink.’

‘Ah! you hurt me, madame,’ replied the Marquis, ‘and reopen a still bleeding wound. Talking of horses, one of my hunters died yesterday, my best animal . . . I had won it at *cavagnol*.’

‘What madness!’ she said. ‘Since when have horses become the stakes at *cavagnol*?’

‘There is nothing new about that,’ replied the Marquis. ‘What have you been doing that you do not know that at Court, when money fails (which not infrequently occurs), we stake everything else, land, carriages, horses, even our wives, when our opponents are satisfied with the value of such currency?’

‘Which is all the more amusing,’ said the Comtesse, ‘because in the last case you are often staking what is no longer yours to dispose of.’

‘Oh!’ replied the Marquis, ‘our philosophy on that point is perfect. But what do I see? A book, *Angola, An Eastern Tale*. Ah! this is something quite new! I have not the honour of knowing it.’

‘I have not that advantage either,’ replied the Comtesse: ‘it was brought to me this morning, and I am not certain whether I dare read it.’

‘It is quite certain to be worthless, as all books of that sort are,’ said the Marquis. ‘I haven’t read a word, yet I wager that I can tell you what is in it from beginning to end. It is apparently about some Fairy who protects a Prince in order to help him to commit follies, and of some Djinn who thwarts him so that he may commit a few more; then there are sure to be extravagant passages in which every one will be delighted to detect an allegory of the century, and the whole will be wound to a strange conclusion by the waving of wands in a way which, though meaningless, will puzzle the imagination of fools, who are always trying to read a hidden meaning into everything.’

‘You have really described it exactly,’ said the Comtesse; ‘it is amazing how your estimate of the book has impressed me: so much, indeed, that I am going to throw it into the fire.’

‘No, do not do that,’ returned the Marquis; ‘whilst I agree with you about the frivolity of works of this sort, I must admit that I read them with pleasure. I enjoy the way in which the story is told, and the more sterile his theme is in itself, the more grateful am I to the author for making it

interesting by the style with which he is clever enough to cloak it; and I find the reading of these trifles much less gloomy than that of some fearsome tome on the title-page of which the author inscribes with impunity, *The Art of Thinking*, though all through his detestable work he seems less like a man thinking than an ox chewing the cud, with the result that I lose my patience and abandon the wretched work to the dust and the worms whose natural food it is.'

'Very well, then,' said the Comtesse, 'let us see if we can bear to read this book right through to the end.'

'Indeed, madame, my voice is not strong enough for such a task, and unless you can supply me with all the embrocation in the universe, I am frankly afraid that I cannot . . .'

'Ah! Marquis, you have committed yourself to it now,' went on the Comtesse, 'and I declare that you will only make me really ill if you refuse; you know what my own health is like and you can well imagine that I should not be able to . . .'

'Very well, then, madame,' said the Marquis, 'however deplorable the condition to which it reduces me, I will bow to my fate; but have your door shut to every one, I implore you, as I am not used to speaking in public, and besides, you can



well understand that if there should be any passages in the book which it is necessary for us to discuss, it would not be right that the discussion should be open to every one like a lecture.'

'By all means,' said the Comtesse, 'tell my servants to say that I am not at home; and in order to complete my sacrifice, if my husband appears, he is to be told that I am desperately ill, that I have not shut my eyes all night and that I am heart-broken at not being able to receive him. Come, Marquis, you may begin.'

'I bow to your commands, madame, with that devotion of which you are so well aware,' replied the Marquis, 'and concerning which I hope you will never be in any doubt. I have even anticipated my reading a little. Why! . . . I think the author must be trying to ingratiate himself; here is a "DEDICATION TO ALL COQUETTES"; although it has nothing whatever to do with you, I think you will find it odd enough. It is almost as though he had divined the situation in which we find ourselves. We must try to make sure that he is not wrong in any of his conjectures. He even contrives to combine passion with humour. [*He reads.*] Oh! very good! . . . Oh, that! I should hope so! . . . Ha-ha! the good fellow likes an offence to be repeated! . . .'

---

‘Oh, Marquis, you fill me with impatience,’ replied the Comtesse; ‘although nothing addressed to coquettes can have any meaning for me. I detest them and am their sworn enemy, and so I love seeing them held up to contempt.’

‘So far from that,’ interrupted the Marquis, ‘they have incense burnt to them. Listen carefully, and I hope that soon you will be tempted to swell their ranks, so that you may receive your share of the court that is ever paid to them.’



## DEDICATION

### TO ALL COQUETTES

IT is to you that I dedicate this book, to you who are the quintessence of the fair sex, which I adore, and who have so exquisitely inherited the bewitching graces which I sketch so lightly here. This book belongs to you: may you look on it as such and treat it as you would a pampered child. Its fate is in your hands. What man could be so hostile to his own interests as to decry it if it finds favour in your eyes? May it reach your hands as you wake after a night passed passionately in the arms of a cherished lover, or may it surprise you at the end of a pleasant dream in which your lively imagination has evoked a pleasure perhaps less tangible but possibly more delightful than reality. May it be read during your sweet tiring-hours, to be interrupted by the frolics of a simpering Abbé or the loving transports of some ardent warrior. May it be a witness to the sweet disorder and wayward setting of your morning toilet; to your resistance to a lover's onslaughts; to your sweet way of scolding which almost seems like gratitude and leads one to repeat an indiscretion; to the impatience of your maids, when, unable to complete the dressing of your hair, they leave the room smiling, resigning to love those moments which they cannot share. Too fortunate book, which will

witness the tenderest emotions! If you open it at one of these moments, perhaps you will find in it episodes which you can act yourself. Happy the mortal who will help you in this charming play! He will be lost in the delight of his rapture, and will sate himself with those precious favours which you only withhold from him in order to make your yielding doubly dear; he will surmount obstacles invented by your passion rather than by your virtue, and which are all to the advantage of your passion: may my book see all this, but may it remain discreet. Think how delightful if it made discretion fashionable once more! I do not fear its fate if only it chooses rightly the moment to appear before your eyes. May you open it after some sweet wayward act, to learn new lessons from its pages and to instil into it a breath of that divine passion which is your essence and which is the soul of nature here below. Graced with this precious gift, its faults will fade away. Who could resist its lure? How irresistible would be its claims to please! If only it could bestow some of them upon its author! If to adore you and to be your most devoted champion were any claim, then I need fear no rival. If only I were put to the test! At what small a cost to myself could I convince you of the point to which I . . .



## ANGOLA : AN EASTERN TALE





# ANGOLA: AN EASTERN TALE

## PART I

### Chapter I

*An introduction more necessary than amusing.*

IN a fertile country in the Far East, whose precise position on the map the extreme accuracy of our modern geographers has, in spite of Strabo and Ptolemy, succeeded in losing for us, there once lived a powerful monarch named Erzeb-Can, whose life and behaviour were entirely different from those of the other Sovereigns of his time: he ruled his own kingdom and, what is more, his ministers; the only wars he undertook were just ones, which he carried through with determination; he levied only such taxes as were absolutely

necessary and was freely accessible to all his subjects. Idle rumour had it that he was not altogether inaccessible to their wives as well, a fact which made him admired for his great wisdom, since by this means he made sure of the complete and unanimous support of both sexes, was generally adored, knew it, and was thoroughly happy in consequence.

Arrived at that age at which Sovereigns owe to their people a choice which is generally guided more by political exigencies than by inclination, he married the Princess Arsénide, a morganatic connection of the Fairy Scintilla, Queen of a neighbouring state. In those days things were not as they are now: State interests and powerful alliances were made the excuse for the most ill-assorted unions, a thing which nowadays would appear altogether monstrous.

Although this marriage, regarded on both sides as a matter of mere expediency, had already been definitely decided upon some time before, as in those days every one was a slave to ceremonial, it was necessary for envoys to be despatched; for this purpose it was not the most intelligent, but the richest gentlemen of the Court who were chosen, care being taken to provide them with skilled secretaries entrusted with the task of settling the

articles of the Marriage Contract in the interests of the two States. To the envoys themselves was left the duty of being provided with magnificent clothes, an immense suite of attendants, the smartest possible carriages, and of ruining themselves, if they wanted to, provided that they did honour to their master by an excessive display of splendour: no one expected them to show any ability.

They left, then, with a vast escort, arrived at the Court of the Fairy Scintilla and formally demanded a thing which had been granted some years before and which was once more with due ceremony accorded. The rest of the time was occupied with balls, comedies, the opera, illuminations and fireworks, and after all, so powerful was the Queen of that country, that all the immoderate rejoicings that take place elsewhere at the expense of the people cost her no more than a wave of her wand.

Moreover, her Court was the most magnificent and gallant of the time. It set the fashion for all the neighbouring Courts: it boasted the most polished customs and exquisite culture, and all foreign Princes who were fortunate enough to know the Fairy sent their children to her to be brought up, and afterwards to enter her Court to acquire

worldly wisdom and the manners of the best Society.

Some days were devoted to feasting and to the farewells of the Princess, after which she started on her journey with the magnificent trousseau given to her by the Fairy, and a thousand tender assurances of protection for herself and for her children. The Fairy promised that she would consult Agrippa and Nostradamus as to the destiny of the first child to be born of the marriage and would, if necessary, correct the evil influences of its planet.

‘Go, my dear child,’ she said, embracing her; ‘I hope your husband will be sensible: that is as much as a woman of quality can wish for; in his youth he was at my Court, where he was a great favourite; moreover, I think he is too much a man of the world for you not to be extremely happy with him. I am giving you a coach and an escort worthy of myself; but above all, dear child, do not forget to take a coiffing maid and a seamstress: you are going to a country whose people, although in other respects the best people in the world, are terribly lacking in skill; none of their servants has ever been able to arrange English lace, or place a flounce or floating ribbon properly; everything they do is abominably awkward and clumsy, so you must take proper precautions.’

.



After this brief counsel, the Fairy embraced her again. She then displayed a little emotion, but not sufficient to rob her of her dignity: in short, she displayed just the correct degree of emotion for persons of high rank, who must not give way to sorrow like common people. The Princess, on the other hand, being less versed in the art of self-control, was really affected: she stepped into her coach with an aching heart and speechless with grief: in her distress she nearly forgot her work-box and a little spaniel bitch which never left her; but at last everything was ready, and she pulled down the blinds and off they went.

## Chapter II

*Which has certainly been foreseen.*

PARTICULAR care was taken to send runners forward daily to King Erzeb-Can to allay his impatience and to assure him that the Princess was not troubled by the vapours or by colds and other inconveniences from which a well-bred woman dared not avoid suffering, especially on a journey, nothing in those days being so vulgar as to enjoy good health. At last she arrived at the Court of Erzeb-Can and was received by that Monarch with every mark of the most ardent and unaffected joy. Indeed, she was an extremely attractive creature, and was in addition full of little mannerisms and bore herself with that self-possessed and spontaneous air which she had acquired at Scintilla's Court, and which could be acquired nowhere else. The days following her arrival were passed in one round of magnificent festivities of every kind which, without perhaps possessing the false glitter of those of the Fairy, were a more patent proof of the real joy of a people who loved their master and took an unconcealed pleasure in his happiness.

The genius of the nation tending naturally towards poetry, such as it was, it is not surprising

that the young pair were welcomed by an infinite number of poems, either Epithalamia or Odes, in which the poets, as was usual, after praising such a well-assorted union to the skies, went on to describe a posterity which was still very far from being assured, lavishing anticipatory praise and prophecies on it. Of this pitiless band of buffoons, those who were distinguished from the others by their work being more modest and less bombastic were rewarded, but the majority of them were left to shout themselves hoarse in the lobbies, reciting their verses into the ears of subordinates, who alone could appreciate their extravagant hyperbole.

The marriage started under the happiest auspices: the King found the possession of the lovely Arsénide so delightful that he put an end to all the minor intrigues he was carrying on about his Court, in order to devote himself entirely to such a charming wife. It was not to be expected that such utter devotion should go unrewarded, and soon afterwards it became known through the gossip of the Court Physicians, followed by that of the public, that the Queen was about to become a mother, a fact which put the crowning touches on the joy of the King and of his people.

The Monarch immediately sent messengers to the Fairy Scintilla and to all the other Fairies of

his acquaintance to inform them of the Queen's pregnancy, and to beg them to attend the birth of the male or female being that would result from it, with the understanding, of course, that they would use all their powers to endow it with every imaginable quality. Until their arrival he devoted himself to procuring for the Queen every possible amusement and comfort, and above all to gratifying all her whims, which included paying a hundred thousand crowns one day for a mousse of humming-birds' eggs for which the Queen had expressed a desire.

### Chapter III

*One cannot please every one.*

AT last the hour of the Queen's confinement drew near, and some days beforehand the Fairies who had been invited began to arrive one by one. The Fairy Scintilla stood out amongst all the others by the magnificence of her travelling coach and the studied adornment of her person. She had sent her attendants on ahead by easy stages; she herself was transported in a moment by her own power to the gates of Erzeb-Can's capital, and finding her people waiting for her to make her entry, she stepped into her coach. This coach was painted to give it the effect of a dark blue cameo; the most tender and voluptuous scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were depicted on the panels, and the mouldings were of a dull gold in the most modern taste; it was upholstered in fine lilac velvet with pink chenille embroidery, and drawn by six exquisite cream-coloured horses, their black manes plaited with blue ribbons and decked with blue rosettes. The postilion, who was still a child and was remarkable for his beauty, reminded one of Cupid leading his mother's chariot. The coachman, on the other hand, was enormous, as were his plume, his muff and his mustachios; in short, his

appearance followed minutely the strictest dictates of fashion. Four handsome outriders preceded the coach and four giant footmen surrounded it, whilst behind were perched five or six tall lackeys of carefully chosen appearance and with the correct insolence of manner.

The Fairy in her coach was even more adorned by her own charms than by her array, though this was the last word in style and elegance. She wore a silver and rose-coloured dress, cut low and decked with flounces and floating ribbons; her hair and her sleeves of English lace were in perfect taste, and all the accessories were in keeping with the rest of her attire; she was a little pale, affecting the right degree of weariness for a well-bred woman who is supposed to have made a journey; in one hand she held the latest novel and in the other her quizzing-glass, whilst on her lap she held two or three cats or dogs, who poked their noses out of the windows.

She reached Erzeb-Can's Palace amidst the acclamations of the people, who knew her power and the friendship she bore towards their King. She was received by this young Prince with the most extraordinary manifestations of joy. All the Fairies, who had been there for some days, came to visit her in her own apartments, where she



remained for three days to regain her strength, reclining on her couch, and making ribbon bows, without being obliged to repay their calls, which is always so exhausting to a pretty woman.

The Fairy Malison was the only one who did not visit her: she had arrived some days before and thought it very strange that the Fairy Scintilla, the last to arrive, had not been to see her, and had contented herself with having her name left at her door; she was a woman of proud and ferocious character and was a slave to the most superficial conventions. The King had invited her more from fear of offending her by not doing so than from any desire for her presence. Already stung by the preference he showed for the Fairy Scintilla and by the difference between the welcome he had given to her and her own reception, she resolved not to let the festivities pass without causing some sort of trouble.

The King, with a view to putting all the Fairies who had come to the Palace in a good temper, prepared the most delightful entertainments for them: there were balls, comedies, opera and all the rest of it, and Scintilla graciously declared them to be quite admirable, and just as exquisitely managed as in her own kingdom. These amusements were followed by a splendid lottery in which

each Fairy drew a ticket entitling her to a magnificent piece of jewelry. Luck would have it that the article that fell to the lot of the Fairy Malison should be a pocket mirror set in precious stones. Now she was as hideous as she could possibly be, and had a topsy-turvy face whose expression was one of black and baleful malice; she had sunken, bloodshot eyes, a snub nose, and a mouth full of discoloured teeth, which seemed to have been repulsively shaped on purpose to make easier the passage of abuse; her speech was vulgar and coarse, her body misshapen; in fact she had neither presence nor face nor figure. The Fairy Scintilla, on the other hand, except for a certain over-affectation, was graceful through and through, and being a coquette by position and inclination, she never missed an opportunity for making fun of people.

As soon as she saw the mirror in Malison's hands she went up to her daintily and said with mock seriousness:

'Fate, madam, has by no means been blind in allotting to you an object so eminently suited to you: it will trace faithfully for you those charms, whose effect is felt by all hearts, and will dispose you to have pity on those hearts in being able yourself to judge the strength of the chains they bear.'

‘Whatever my charms may be,’ retorted Malison in a sour voice, ‘they are free from artificiality and affectation, and I am doubtful whether some people who pride themselves on their beauty can boast as much.’

The King caught these last words and hurried over: as he loved the one just as much as he feared the other, he tried to calm down their little dispute; but all through the most soothing arguments that he could employ, his preference for the Fairy Scintilla showed itself so clearly that Malison began to think that it was not merely by chance that the mirror had fallen to her lot, but that it was a trick played on her in which the King had shared: she skilfully concealed her vexation and resolved to take a bitter revenge for the insult.

The moment of the Queen’s delivery having arrived, all the Fairies betook themselves to her chamber, and she gave birth to a young Prince who was more beautiful than the day. Scintilla took him in her arms, as did the other Fairies, and they vied with one another in endowing him with all the good qualities which make men respected and monarchs loved: virtue, bravery, wit, beauty, everything was lavished on him. Erzeb-Can was already overcome with joy, when the livid Malison suddenly appeared:

‘You have endowed the Prince with every virtue,’ she said in a terrible voice, ‘but you have forgotten Patience, which is the one of which he will have most need.’ And approaching the child, she touched him with her wand: ‘You will fall in love,’ she said, ‘and the very thing that causes the happiness of others will be to you the source of the most cruel torments; the most consuming sorrows will devour you. You will see the object of your desires pass into another’s arms and you will be forced to consent to it; the most appalling doubts will rend you, and I hope that an even more cruel certainty will crown my vengeance.’

With these words she leapt into a chariot drawn by six owls, which suddenly appeared before the eyes of the assembly, and disappeared through the roof, leaving a foul stench behind her, and King and all his Court plunged into the utmost consternation.

## Chapter IV

*Even evil has its uses.*

ERZEB-CAN could not get over the shock which the cruel Malison's speech had given him; but the Fairy Scintilla, in whom he had great confidence, spoke to him and comforted him:

'Do not let your feelings overcome you,' she said; 'these terrible threats are not without their remedy. I cannot, it is true, destroy what an intelligence equal to my own has created or foreseen, but I can mitigate its severity, and by the good advice and care that I shall give the Prince, your son, I can spare him at least a part of the misfortunes that threaten him. I want him to be named Angola, which means Joyous. Bring him up carefully, and when he is fifteen years old, the age at which Nature seems to want to shake off the yoke of youthful ignorance, I will take him with me to my Court. All his misfortunes must have as their origin some serious or tender attachment, and my Court is the most excellent antidote for this kind of poison: the variety of the pleasures there will keep his mind in equilibrium, as it were, and this may help him to evade his evil fate, and I may perhaps venture to predict the happiest future for him . . . I am not allowed to say more: banish

your fears, for in me you have a devoted and faithful friend.'

The other Fairies also promised the King their protection and help for his princely son, each according to her own power; and some days later they all returned to their own realms. The Fairy Scintilla stayed on for a few days to complete her task of comforting the King; and then, as her presence was necessary in her own kingdom, she kissed the little Prince affectionately, and after giving the King and Queen a final word of advice and repeating her promise to come and fetch the Prince when he should reach the age of fifteen, she vanished from their sight.

Erzeb-Can took the greatest care in the education of his son, and the Queen loved him with the utmost tenderness: it was all the easier for them to concentrate their affection on the little Prince, as he was the only fruit of their love; but, if no child was ever more cherished, no child certainly ever deserved it more. Even at the tenderest age a simple and touching grace shone through the natural awkwardness of childhood: an air of gentleness and calm in a face of perfect beauty gave the most happy auguries for his character; but when he reached the age of twelve years and his mind began to develop, what wit he showed!



what clearness of judgement! and how much grace in his slightest movements! A precocious vigour in his train of thought showed clearly the powerful and able gifts of a celestial intelligence.

Soon they gave him tutors who were supposed to be the best in the kingdom. Most of them (for they were not like those of to-day) performed their task extremely badly; but they were dealing with such a happy disposition and such a keen intelligence, that he always guessed more than they tried to teach him, in spite of all the pedantic terms and obscure phraseology with which their lessons bristled; one of them, charged with instructing him in ethics, instead of making their conception clear by a straightforward and natural exposition, endeavoured to confuse him with a torrent of elegantly obscure phrases, and a mass of strange words piled one on another, which were quite meaningless; and after working desperately to make himself unintelligible, he was astounded to hear the young Prince, by an effort of his delightful intelligence, repeat to him in a few simple and carefully chosen words the thesis which he himself had not been able to expound in a couple of hours of terrific effort.

Another, charged with instructing him in the pleasing arts of dancing and music, which so add

to personal charm and are such a mark of careful upbringing, would arrive in a great bustle and employ himself in taking his jewelry out of his pocket or in examining himself *ad nauseam* in all the pier-glasses, cutting capers and gurgling to himself all the time, or in practising steps from the latest quadrille at the Opera, and other follies of the same sort. Another, seated complacently before a harpsichord, would try rather to show off his own skill than to develop that of his pupil, and would hum a few bars from a popular opera, interrupting himself a dozen times to take out five or six watches, pretending to be terribly busy and to have every moment of his time parcelled out. Madame So-and-So, who had a mania for singing only in bed, was waiting for him; he had to dine with the Duchesse de \* \* \* and had promised to spend the evening at the cloister of the \* \* \* Convent. He would have to break faith with one or the other, for 'one is not made of iron'; as for supper, it was to be a secluded affair on the outskirts of the city with some pretty women whose favourite he was. All this would be said with a self-conscious grin and an affected air of mystery which put the finishing touch on the fellow's foppery. He would then get up, adjust his hair and his shirt frills before a mirror, and finish by teaching the

Prince, as an especial favour, some stupid and obscene rhymes which were all the rage at the moment in boudoirs, and which he made him repeat under a seal of secrecy, assuring him that he possessed a flute-like voice, a brilliant sense of harmony and, in fact, unique aptitudes for music; adding that, so far as he was concerned, he would thenceforward deny himself the pleasure of giving him lessons which were quite superfluous, and would content himself with remaining his very humble servant. After overflowing with nonsense of this sort, he would leave, bowing and scraping to the ground, in a way that was then very fashionable, and had been invented as a contrast to the people who saluted in a business-like manner, that is to say, by a slight bow, and which, although outwardly and at first glance it seemed more respectful, was really just as fatuous as the other, in view of the intentions of three-quarters of the people who practised it.

The Prince, bored to death by all the idiocies of these people, was sometimes inclined to have them flung out of the window; but as in common fairness he would have been forced to extend his punishment to the whole of their species, and as he had either to have them or others like them, he curbed his impatience and let his own happy

disposition override all the obstacles erected by the impertinence of these teachers, who, spoilt by the Court Nobles, whose mania at that time was to be intimate with them, forgot by degrees both their profession and their origin. Owing to a whim of fashion, no dinner-party could be thoroughly smart without them, and they were invited everywhere: pretty women flung themselves at their heads, and their only trouble was in the choice of their amusements; and all the time they neglected the progress of their pupils, thinking that they were conveying a great honour on them by leaving their smart carriages (for they all had them) at their doors.

Those who read this story may fairly pity the Prince for having fallen into the hands of such preposterous people; they will be rightly surprised at the prodigious difference between the conduct of the professors of that time and of those of the present day, who are justly esteemed to be the most important men in the world and whose vigilance, application, and, above all, whose modesty leave nothing to be desired for the upbringing of the young; but, after all, human nature has fallen off in so many directions that it is only to be expected that it would improve in others.

In spite of all these drawbacks, the Prince

developed into a prodigy of wit and accomplishments; the invisible hand of the Fairy Scintilla guided him and bestowed on him in profusion all the gifts which characterize a charming man. Erzeb-Can and his Queen were never tired of admiring him and of lavishing affection on him: a devotion which was all the better for not resembling that of those deluded parents who adore everything in their children, even their most obvious shortcomings and their most vicious tendencies: a fatal form of kindness which generally ends in the destruction of the idol and sometimes of its worshippers as well.

At length the Prince's fifteenth birthday approached, and the King and Queen, remembering the Fairy's promises and confident of the satisfaction the sight of the young Angola would give her, began eagerly looking forward to her arrival.

## Chapter V

### *New surroundings.*

ERZEB-CAN and Arsénide awaited Scintilla's arrival with much impatience: true to her promise, she suddenly appeared one day in their private apartments, and they welcomed her with the greatest joy; a charming serenity shone from her brow and something supernatural marked in her a divine and gracious understanding.

'I know,' she said, addressing the King, 'all the care you have taken of Angola: though this is natural in a father, I appreciate it highly, and I have never lost sight of him for a single moment. The interest which I take in him has increased as the development of his talents has rendered him more worthy of my care; it is for me to put the finishing touches on what nature and your solicitude have so well begun. I am going to transport him into a new element, into a glittering and turbulent Court, where I confess that reality is almost indistinguishable from falsity, which clothes itself constantly in the garb of reality, adding perhaps a few touches which only make its attraction more dangerous. Mindful of everything that might contribute to his education, I will pilot him through all these pleasant dangers and voluptuous



illusions, only letting him skim the surface of them, an experience which is indispensable for accustoming a young man to the usages of Society, and for dispelling the vulgar prejudices with which the tutors of young people fill their pedantic lessons. Have no fear that familiarity with the ways of women will demoralize him or spoil his disposition: that is a worn-out theory which is no longer given any credence in what is called Society, and of the falsity of which your own intelligence must readily convince you. Familiarity with women gives a young man poise, makes him use his accomplishments and show his best side to the world, and also rids him of that stupid and ill-placed timidity which discounts all the advantages of youth; the necessity of attracting and of appearing charming dissipates the uncouthness of the schoolboy and his formal politeness, and gives him that delightful and self-confident bearing which belongs to good Society and can only be acquired there.

‘Besides, you need have no fear of his forming any serious attachment, for the fickleness of my Court ladies will preserve him from all danger of that: they have no time for love into which only emotion enters, and they find it far more absurd than respectable; they only insist on a violent

whirlwind passion with all the charm of the culmination of a great love affair without the boredom of its early stages; your son will only commit himself enough for his own amusement, and never enough to cause him any uneasiness; and so long as he does not allow himself any more serious passion, I think he is perfectly safe from Malison's prophecies. But I am dying of impatience to see my charming pupil. I beg that you will no longer deprive me of that pleasure, so that I may have the satisfaction of showing him the affection of which I have already assured you.'

The King, delighted at these proofs of the Fairy's friendship, commanded the Prince to be sent for. Scintilla was quite charmed with his appearance: his tall and well-proportioned figure and his air of dignity and self-reliance bore witness to the nobility of his birth; the beauty of his face was flawless, his features were perfectly regular, and an indefinable air of tenderness and sensitiveness, combined with the grace of his charming youth, gave his attractions that appealing quality which is a thousand times more desirable than beauty itself. In fact, his whole presence was a marvellous portrayal of every perfection, in which the only thing lacking was that social air which he was so easily to acquire. The Fairy could

not look at him without emotion, and found it difficult to confine her feelings to those of mere friendship: she was just as pleased with his wit and with his quick intelligent answers to her questions as she had been with his appearance. Angola, on his side, was dazzled by Scintilla, who was in the very perfection of her youth (for Fairies never grow old). Full of grace and charm, she possessed in addition the peculiar elegance that was the mark of her Court and of which she was the most perfect example.

Angola was far from being insensible to such an attractive being: his heart, which was not used to such violent upheavals, experienced an unaccustomed thrill, sure indication of the sway that love would one day hold over it, and had it not been for the timely feeling of respect that curbed his instincts he might have fallen headlong in love there and then; but after recovering from his first agitation, he made up his mind only to look on the Fairy as an enlightened guide, whose advice it was his duty to follow unquestioningly. However, he felt none of that repugnance one generally has for one's mentors: which was where, without his realizing it, his heart betrayed him.

The preparations for the Prince's departure occupied several days: the King and Queen lavished

their affection on him, and their leave-taking was unfeignedly tender. They never tired of recommending this dear son, their only hope, to the Fairy, and she, in true friendship, humoured their loving fears. Finally, with renewed promises and protestations of mutual affection, she and the Prince stepped into her chariot drawn by six doves and disappeared into the sky.

They soon reached the Fairy's Palace and, passing invisibly through her apartments, she closeted herself in her boudoir with him, in order to give him a few final instructions before launching him on her Court.

'You are now in an entirely new element, my dear Angola,' she said to him affectionately. 'The objects that you will see here, the customs, the manners, are all quite different from those of your father's Court; one of these days you will learn the grave reasons which led him to confide your youthful education to me. You are at an age when the most violent passions will vie with one another to gain possession of your heart, and it would be beyond your power to resist them altogether, nor would I be unjust enough to ask you to try; but everything depends upon your not letting yourself be mastered by them; above all, the passion of love will be offered to you in its most attractive and

most dangerous forms; but beware of yielding completely to it, for if you do so your rashness will be followed by the most cruel misfortunes: do not resist it absolutely, but be careful only to pluck the very flower of it. Try to accustom yourself to regard it only as the salt of other pleasures, to add excitement to them, and be sure that your heart, even in the most tender transports, always keeps command over itself. Enjoy yourself and be happy, but always guard your freedom.'

'I know nothing yet, adorable Fairy,' replied Angola, 'of the dangers which you say are threatening me, but I hope that the fidelity with which I shall follow your advice will protect me from them; and if it is absolutely necessary for me to succumb, who else but . . .'

He could not finish his sentence, he stammered, and the words died on his lips, whilst a charming flush crept up and mingled with the roses in his cheeks; he raised a bashful glance to the Fairy, but hurriedly dropped it again. Scintilla, who was possibly even more moved than he was, either fearing or not daring to divine his meaning, hastened to put an end to the conversation.

'The hour has come for me to hold my levee,' she said to the Prince; 'my Court will crowd into my apartments and I will introduce you as a newly

arrived Prince, the son of a King to whom I am allied; you will receive a great deal of attention and many expressions of friendliness, and it will be for you to distinguish the real from the false; for this is the land of protestations and of humbug. Only take those people into your confidence of whose true feelings you are not in any doubt, but treat the others courteously. I shall very soon be able to judge of your disposition, and my affection for you will be measured by the steps you take to make yourself worthy of it.'

With these words she gave the Prince her lovely hand; after a moment's shy hesitation an uncontrollable impulse seized him, and he pressed on it a kiss so tender that it would have been fraught with meaning to a much less intelligent person than the Fairy: she entirely returned his feelings, and she flattered herself that it would not be difficult for her to educate him and make something of him, but she deferred her instruction for a more favourable occasion; and summoning her Chamberlains, she commanded the doors to be thrown open and the Court admitted.



## Chapter VI

*Which is but a continuation of the last.*

SCINTILLA was adored at her Court. Finding it more pleasant to inspire love than fear, she only exercised her power over her subjects by showering favours on them; she treated them with a gentle and charming familiarity which mitigated the arrogance of the sceptre without detracting from its might. She hated violence and vice, the usual accompaniments of unlimited power, and was mistress of her subjects' hearts through the claims of gratitude; so that her Court was a scene of pleasure from which were banished all fear, distrust and the spirit of revolt: in fact, all the mass of gloomy intrigue which is the inevitable result of an unjust rule and which, even before it breaks out, sours the existence of an evil monarch. In this happy Court the only atmosphere was that of splendour and pleasure, pleasant conceits which alone can make us forget the sorrows of existence.

The Fairy had been away for several days, and the sincerity of her people's joy at her return was a clear proof of the depth of their affection for her; she accepted this joy with a delight and a graciousness which showed how essential it was to her happiness, and when the principal ladies and

gentlemen of her Court had drawn round her she summoned Angola to her.

‘This,’ she said, ‘is the son of my friend and ally, Erzeb-Can, who has confided his education to me; this precious trust will but serve to strengthen the bonds that unite us; he has the strongest claims upon my affection, and I hope that he will be fortunate enough to capture your own. I shall regard any consideration or attention that may be paid him as though it were paid to myself, and no one can show his devotion for me better than by declaring a like devotion for him.’

In any Court in the world such an introduction would have been sufficient to decide the reception that would be accorded to the Prince; and above all others in this Court, where the precepts of an adored Sovereign were received as the wise counsels of a friend. The Prince was immediately deluged with courtesies, all really very insincere; but his gentleness and his interesting appearance immediately began to win every one’s heart; persons of both sexes examined him with curiosity. The fashionable gentlemen of the Court, compelled to admit his personal attractions, were inwardly vexed at having such a formidable rival thrust on them; at the same time they hoped that his disposition would belie his appearance and that

he would be lacking in those courtly airs and in the jargon that has taken the place of real wit, and has the effect of captivating three women out of four. Until they could form an opinion of his character they amused themselves by deciding that his movements were foreign and self-conscious, and that there was something awkward about his appearance; also that he was too delicate and handsome for a man, which gave rise to jests in the worst possible taste. The women, however, avenged him for these slights: most of them were entranced by his appearance; too experienced for even the least of his charms to escape their notice, they saw that all he lacked was that tender and voluptuous animation which would come with his first love affair, and the germ of which could be seen lurking behind his shy and embarrassed glances. They sighed softly at him, and there was not one amongst them who did not ardently desire to gather the first-fruits from such a charming tree.

Angola was not used to scenes of such brilliance, and for some time was very ill at ease. His father's Court was totally different from this, and had not prepared him for the lavish splendour that was blended here with the most perfect taste. His eyes, after wandering hesitatingly over the general scene, fell by natural instinct on the circle of

charming women who by their rank or by their duties were nearest to the Fairy's person: what a bevy of beauty and perfections! How sumptuous and tasteful their array! Each one of them seemed to have a claim on his heart, and fervent emotions and a thousand tumultuous desires swelled in his bosom. Being naturally sensitive and voluptuous, he was already getting a foretaste of that sweet madness which distinguishes the early love affairs of youth: he did not know which to settle on: his heart, a prey to all sorts of ardent impulses, was lost in that delightful hesitation which precedes passion and is perhaps not the least of its joys; he wanted them all, and this catholicity in his yearnings prevented him from being captivated by any particular one.

The ceremonial toilet of the Fairy interrupted his pleasant reveries; the first complimentary speeches now gave way to general conversation, the keynote of which was gallantry and lightness. They all vied with one another in exhibiting their intelligence and their wit, the men in the hope of outshining the Prince, and the women in the desire of making a conquest of him; they were all, however, agreed on one point, which was to study his character and to find out if it was in accord with his appearance. Their astonishment or satisfaction,

according to their sex, was extreme: whenever he joined in the conversation a natural eloquence lent charm to his least important utterance; a delightful unaffected simplicity, combined with a firm and dignified voice, distinguished everything he said; and although he had not yet acquired the perfect knack of bringing out those little Court phrases which often can only be employed at the sacrifice of common sense, yet he took part in the frivolity of the conversation with a modest enjoyment which won every heart. It is true that the conversation was mainly about things of which he was not competent to judge, but in this his natural ability came to the rescue. They discussed all the latest fashions minutely: every day the Queen had a doll of each sex brought to her, so that she should keep in touch with any change that had taken place in fashion since the previous day. Decisions of this sort usually emanated from some elegant supper party, from the attire of some coquette, from the dressing-room of some actress at the Opera, or from some dressmaker's shop, and care was always taken to submit them to the Queen, that she might, if necessary, modify them according to her superior wisdom.

Following on this interesting discussion would come the story of the latest intrigue, which some

favoured gentleman of the Queen's immediate circle would tell her in a whisper which every one could hear and which would draw a great many ribald comments from the young men and a great many carefully prepared blushes from the ladies. For this purpose fans were found to be a great help: the ladies simpered and hid their faces; for at Court not every one can blush who wants to, and it is very awkward for a woman not to succeed in blushing when she tries.

The conversation would then turn on the merits of some entertainment or of some lively ribald song, the score of which would be passed from hand to hand with an affectation of mystery, but in such a way that it ended by falling into the hands of the Queen, who all the time she was reading it pretended that she did not want to look at it and not to be interested in it, at the same time finding it charming and very dashing, although she protested she could not understand a word of it. All the Court ladies followed her lead, and highly appreciated the best passages whilst seeming not to have understood anything.

Whilst all this trifling was going on the Fairy's toilet was completed, though to tell the truth, having nothing to repair, the care of her adornment required very little attention from her, her



natural charms being proof against all her dissipations and those of her women. Finally she appeared in all her splendour, attired in a peculiar and fascinating style of her own, which was imitated by many of the Court ladies, though most of them only succeeded in spoiling it by carrying it to a ridiculous point of exaggeration. She left her apartments leaning with affectionate unconcern on Angola's arm; and this preference, which was already so pronounced, excited the jealousy of both sexes, but from entirely different motives.

## Chapter VII

*We make a little progress.*

NEXT followed a pleasant walk in the delightful gardens of the Fairy's Palace. This would be the place for me to describe these gardens in relentless detail, to lead the reader amongst the flower-beds, the thickets, the mazes with their wonderful fountains and their statues by the greatest masters, and to give a hundred thousand other details of this kind which would only serve to prolong his sufferings. I will content myself by saying that they were romantic gardens: if that is not a sufficient description for unimaginative people, they have only to open the first book that comes to their hand, and there they will find descriptions which I defy them to read without dying of boredom before they are half-way through. Personally, I will spare them such a severe test.

The Court dispersed into the various paths, only a few of the ladies with whom she was most intimate and a few favoured courtiers remaining with the Queen. The conversation took a less general turn, and therefore became more interesting; the novelty of everything and the prevailing atmosphere of voluptuousness had made an impression on the Prince which was betrayed by the expres-

sion in his eyes, and gave the Fairy her cue: she was always ready to talk of love and gallantry, nor was the topic one that wearied the ladies of her Court.

‘You seem so far away,’ she said to the Prince; ‘why do you wear such a melancholy look? Is it boredom, or something more serious? You do not answer; I am really beginning to believe that you are in love, and I am dying to know the name of the fortunate lady who has wrought such a wonderful change in you; I should like to congratulate her on such a rapid conquest.’

She said this with so much tenderness that it was quite obvious that she would have been grievously disappointed if the congratulations proved to be due to anyone but herself.

‘I do not know,’ said one of the Court ladies, whose name was Zobéide, ‘if such a rapid conquest would be so very pleasant for the lady who has made it; it might seem such a flattering one that every one’s jealousy would be aroused; and her constant fear of losing him would make her pay dearly for any sweet moments their mutual passion might afford her.’

Angola, who until now had been so busy forming a general impression of his surroundings that he had not particularly noticed any individual

person, could not help looking with interest at the lady who expressed a fear so flattering to himself: seldom had he seen such charm and attractiveness concentrated in one person. In Zobéide, who was barely eighteen years old, were combined all the childish graces of her age with the assurance of the most accomplished woman of the world; as lovely as the day, she despised all the artifices used by those beauties who seem to be emaciated and decrepit from their very youth. Her attire, it is true, was in the height of fashion, but this only helped to enhance the splendour of her figure and the beauty of her features, and she made use of no artifice to heighten their effect. Such striking beauty had an immediate effect on the Prince, who gazed at her with the most tender emotion; and at that instant his wandering affections found a resting place. He took advantage of a moment in which one of the Ministers came to lay before the Queen a list of new appointments to be signed, assuring her on his word of honour that he had filled them with the most capable candidates. The Fairy, who would have scorned to hesitate in face of such an assurance, immediately signed the list without reading it, and then drew aside with him to give him some orders. The Prince seized the opportunity of approaching Zobéide.

‘How happy I should be, madam,’ he said in a low and halting voice, ‘if the sweet fear which you expressed just now were real, and how flattered I should feel if I thought I could inspire it in you!’

‘What I said,’ she answered in agitation, ‘was only in answer to the Queen’s remarks: it is true that, in general, I can think of no more distressing situation than that of a woman who, considering that she has a right to count on a man’s love by the very violence of her own, sees herself momentarily in danger of losing it.’

‘How cruelly you disappoint me,’ interrupted the Prince in confusion, ‘and how rightly you have shown me my presumption in daring, even for a moment, to apply such a flattering situation to myself. Ah! Charming illusion! How short-lived you have been!’

‘I cannot delude myself,’ replied Zobéide, ‘that you are very distressed at its loss, for I am not vain enough to imagine that it interested you to that extent; you are anxious to acquire the tone of our Court, and it is one of the duties of a man of the world to pay his court to every one, and perhaps my only merit in your eyes is that I am the first to have attracted your notice.’

‘Why do you torment me with such pitiless

suspensions?’ answered Angola. ‘If only I could by my most earnest vows . . .’

‘Stop!’ cried Zobéide, already half-persuaded of the truth of what she so ardently desired. ‘Time and your own behaviour will prove more to me than all your protestations. Passion has so far left me quite untouched, and such a state is much too delightful for me to abandon it lightly; yet I do not know . . . But the Queen is coming back, and she must not suspect us; unless I am much mistaken she would by no means appreciate such confidences between us.’

Dinner was now announced and the whole Court returned to the Palace. Afterwards they played card games, either *biribi* or *cavagnol*; each person selected the game he preferred. Card-tables were brought in. The stewards had the greatest difficulty in arranging the games, owing to the studied disorder that reigned in the rooms and the capriciousness of the players, who wanted to sit now at one table and now at another. At last the games started, with much confusion and inattention, and continued in the same manner, though with a great deal of avarice: the players looked over each other’s hands, cheated, and either despaired when they lost or became overbearing when they won. The younger men, who did not play, lolled



rather than sat on sofas with the ladies, whispered into their ears, looked at the cards of the players nearest to them and offered them advice, or softly hummed the words of some wanton song, for which the ladies tapped them with their fans for the sake of appearance; in fact, everything followed the strictest rules of good Society.

The rest of the evening and the days that followed were passed with very much the same pleasures and the same occupations. The Prince acquired the respect of several men and the love of all the women, but as his heart yearned for Zobéide, and as this yearning was counterbalanced by the charms of the Fairy, he was quite indifferent to every one else. He was in one of those love quandaries which opportunity alone can solve and in which the one ultimately favoured, however powerful her attraction, would not altogether banish some pleasant memory of her rival: in fact, he had in his heart the germs of all that goes to make up a man of fashion and a perfect dandy. It will be seen whether he fulfilled this promise.

Amongst the younger gentlemen of the Court who had become attached to him, he was particularly fond of Almaïr, a young man of the highest birth and one of the most fashionable nobles at the Court. He could not have fallen into better hands

for the cultivation of the happy dispositions with which Nature had endowed him, and he was not long in showing the effects of his lessons. The plays and, above all, the Opera of the country had been praised to him; he was, therefore, all impatience for the first Friday of the month. Not wishing to see it too unostentatiously he begged Almaïr to accompany him, as there were so many questions he wished to put to him on matters of which he was still quite ignorant and which every well-bred man should know.

## Chapter VIII

### *Theatres, and their uses.*

THE PRINCE was assiduous in his attentions to the Fairy for the next few days. He gradually grew accustomed to the splendour and to the fashionable foibles of the time; he began to find them more bearable, and this feeling naturally led to another, which was the wish to acquire them himself. He saw Zobéide again: his simplicity perhaps stood him in better stead with her than the most carefully prepared speeches would have done, and made a much more powerful impression on her. Zobéide, much flattered at having captivated an untried heart and at being the object of its first affections, gave him an insight into some of her feeling for him, delighted at being assured of something which she would have been very distressed to doubt; but being unable to cast off the usual manœuvres of Court life, she kept slyly hinting her doubts and fears, which a more experienced man than he would have tried to calm by the most tender transports, but which to the eyes of the uninitiated Prince seemed to be insuperable obstacles.

At last the day of the Opera arrived, and the Queen attended it with a large and splendid

retinue. The Prince, who was eager to learn all about this form of entertainment, was one of the first to appear. He went behind the scenes with Almaïr and they approached a group of divinities who were receiving with a bored and childish tolerance the praise of some young men, foolish admirers of their artificial charms. One of the girls was puffing herself out to bursting point to call attention to a deficient and shored-up bosom, which, by its natural submissiveness betrayed the intentions of its mistress whenever she relaxed her efforts for a moment. Another, under pretence of rehearsing a ballet step, tried to expose her ankles and legs so as to distract attention from the hideous shape of her bust. Many a girl found herself petted and her favours eagerly competed for in this enchanted country, where, a short time before, plunged in the most sordid vice, she had served as butt and makeshift at the lowest debauches.

Long before the piece began the stage buzzed with a dozen different tunes with which these painted sirens tried to lure the foolish into their nets. The incense that burnt most actively before their altars was that of foreigners, who were readily forgiven what they lacked in polish and wit for their other *sterling* qualities. As soon as the girls

saw Angola they at once wanted to make a conquest of him; but on being told his rank, and seeing him in the company of Almaïr, one of the most caustic cynics of the Court, they abandoned the attempt as hopeless.

The Prince, in order to do the proper thing, under the advice of Almaïr, loitered a good deal in the wings, showed himself through the curtain and on both sides of the box-tier, was noticed by the Queen, who saw him and then quizzed him out of good manners, finally waving to him with her fan, a gesture to which he responded to the best of his ability with a bouquet he held in his hand; but Almaïr, suddenly noticing that he had no quizzing-glass himself, told him what a breach of decorum this was; that nothing was so ill-bred and unmannerly as to possess good sight; that every one of an assured position in Society screwed up his eyes and was quite blind at a distance of four yards; and that were it not so their lives would be a burden to them, as they would have to salute the whole human race.

The Prince, horrified at such a fault, called one of his attendants and bade him fetch a quizzing-glass immediately; and whilst awaiting it Almaïr explained its use to him. They were interrupted by the orchestra, which began to play the prelude,

and they went to the box-tier; they were giving *H . . . and A . . .* The faultless and melodious overture proclaimed the great talent of the master who composed it. In vain the adherents of the older school, who were not so much venerable as senile, tried to find fault with such an excellent work, either by saying that the music was unsympathetic, or that it was foreign to the spirit of our language. Compelled to give him his due, they were obliged to admit sulkily that this divine man was as great a master of Nature as he was of Art, and that he excelled in all that was simple and touching just as he did in more ambitious work. Those who were open to reason gave way, and the more obstinate amused themselves by singing popular songs of the previous century.

For some time the Prince was dazzled by the novelty and enchanting splendour of the scene. By degrees he grew more at ease and was better able to consider calmly all the great talent that was spread before him. He listened to the Opera with some vulgarity: that is to say, he gave it his whole attention, whilst Almaïr, more experienced than he, simpered, relentlessly quizzed all the women, kept on shifting in his seat, on which he sprawled rather than sat, and hummed in a low voice what the actor was singing on the stage. The Prince,



annoyed at this perpetual movement, said to him:

‘I thought one came to a play to listen to it, but apparently that is not the fashionable thing to do, for you are so inattentive that you can surely neither recognize its beauties nor its faults.’

‘Oh, come now! You are joking!’ replied Almaïr. ‘One has one’s reputation to keep up, and nothing is so tedious as to listen to a piece like a shopkeeper or a newly arrived provincial: we people of a certain social position are supposed to know everything; we come here to look at the women and to be seen by them; we only pay attention during two or three fashionable passages, and at the end we either praise the whole piece exorbitantly or condemn it pitilessly. It is the author’s business to enlist our support beforehand, since his fate is in our hands, and since it is quite obvious that he can have no talent at all unless he is fortunate enough to please us.’

‘If that be so,’ said the Prince, ‘as your attention is not taken up I shall be most obliged if you would let me know what are the chief things to admire here.’

‘With the greatest pleasure,’ said Almaïr. ‘That actor who has just come on the stage in the part of the young Prince is one of those people who possess

gifts rarely bestowed by the gods on mortals. His divine voice is a combination of the most melodious notes, the most brilliant production, and the most perfectly rendered cadences: master of the art of touching hearts, he lifts us out of ourselves and makes us share all the different emotions through which he passes. It is to these wonderful talents that, report has it, are due the adventures which have put him on a level with the best people at Court; and although, perhaps, this competition has ruined him, it is always a matter of pride for one of his condition to have entered the lists at all, to have possessed the hearts of women and to have routed rivals who never dreamed of being mentioned in the same category as himself. Moreover, his voice is one of the least of his talents: he is charming and popular in Society and, what is more astonishing, never forgets his position there.'

At the end of the first act, Almaïr informed the Prince that it was necessary for him to be seen for a moment in the Royal box. They made their way across, and Angola was received by the Queen with her usual kindness, into which crept a few loving glances to which the Prince only dared attribute half their meaning. Angola was dazzled by her beauty: she was robed magnificently and

wore the finest diamonds, which she adorned even more than they adorned her. Zobéide's image faded from the Prince's mind to give place wholly to that of the lady before him, whose tender glances allowed him, even with his want of conceit, to cherish great hopes for the future. The Fairy marked the impression she was making on the Prince, and in the course of conversation she found means to murmur some of those little phrases which can only be heard and understood by two persons who want to understand each other, and between whom there is a definite organic sympathy which reveals to them their mutual sentiments: a dangerous experiment to try with a man of the world, as it gives him too great an advantage, but one which at the most only serves to encourage the novice.

The conversation was interrupted by the appearance on the stage of a famous actress, who had the support of every section of the public. This woman, alone of all her sex, combined the most ravishing voice with the most marvellous power of lyrical utterance. Her voice, whose volume was immense, and which she could either raise or lower according to circumstances, and her inflexions, either rapid or fluted, but always equally amazing, afforded an example of the highest pitch

to which the art of singing could be brought; in addition to this she could give a faithful interpretation of any passion whatever. True sympathy and a lively and passionate action characterized her singing; sometimes she would enrapture her audience with a light, gay melody; and at others in a soulful and touching passage, faithfully tracing the despair of an unhappy lover, she would grip all the faculties of one's mind, stirring up soft thrills in one's heart and forcing from the eyes of emotional people those tears which are shed with such real pleasure. Her song was followed by a dance executed by two people who were inimitable in their own way. One, a man, tall and well proportioned, performed the most intricate steps: his agility was such that the perfection and accuracy of his movements often deceived the eye; his steps and postures held a mute appeal which took all hearts by storm; he depicted passion in realistic colours, and one was conscious of this without being ashamed at being affected by something purely mechanical.

His partner, a girl with the lightness of a bird, and the most admirable nicety of movement, danced in a way one would have thought almost impossible, throwing herself into the air, where she seemed to hover in the breeze. Her marvellous

leaps and incredible agility pointed out a new path to dancers which none of them has been tempted to follow. During the well-merited applause that followed their performance, Almaïr perceived Zobéide with Aménis, another of the Court ladies, in a little lobby box. He pointed his discovery out to the Prince, who, torn between the Fairy and Zobéide, was uncertain as to what he should do; but Zobéide, having seen them and quizzed them, signed to them with her fan. On Almaïr pointing out to the Prince that it would be markedly rude not to go, this decided him, and they left the Queen's box together.

They reached the corridor of the amphitheatre and were introduced into the lobby, where they discovered Zobéide and Aménis reclining lazily and amusing themselves by making bows of ribbon. They were in low-cut dresses without paniers, in fact, in the costume prescribed for incognito.

'I have been so ill all day I am nearly dead,' said Zobéide in a drooping voice, at the same time casting an affectionate glance in the Prince's direction; dear Aménis has been sweet enough to distract me in my loneliness, and I came here to dispel the vapours, which were exhausting me. I do not know why, but I am not at all my usual

self: the boisterous pleasures of the Court weary me, and I should like to go to some little quiet retreat in charming company, where one could ...'

'What an admirable idea!' cried Almaïr. 'I admire this meditative spirit in you, madam. I feel the force of your example, and at this very moment I too would like to go quietly away somewhere. I will try to put Aménis into the same frame of mind, leaving the work of converting the Prince to you; but as things of this sort should never be arranged before third parties, I beg that you will allow me to instruct Aménis in private, and that at the same time you will be kind enough to do the same for the Prince. Unless I am much mistaken, his inclinations are all that you could possibly desire.'

Almaïr, highly skilled in the art of worldly wisdom and of women, had at once guessed Zobéide's designs on the Prince and the Prince's timid passion for Zobéide. In order to spare these two lovers a long delay which might easily make her impatient and him weary, he had decided to render them a great service and to cut short the preliminaries by throwing them together and putting them at their ease. In addition, he had determined to seize the earliest opportunity of



instructing the Prince in the way in which love affairs were handled at Court, avoiding the protracted insipidity and tedium which was inevitable in such affairs in the Provinces; besides, he already had an understanding with Aménis, and he was not sorry to have a few minutes' conversation with her.

So that, when he suggested a private conversation, Zobéide began with her usual vivacity to deride the idea, but in the end was only too glad to take advantage of it. Very soon both the conversations came round to the subject of love, which they discussed in the most modern way, that is to say, they stripped it of its flowery phrases and of those wearying protestations up to which it cannot possibly live. They found each other mutually charming, and said so and let each other see it, and from that point it is not a very far cry to wanting to prove it.

They were at the most intimate part of their conversation when Almaïr, who was very strict about etiquette, pointed out to them that the fifth act was in progress; and as there is nothing so vulgar as to wait for the end of a play, even when it contains the best passages, they left the theatre. Almaïr gave his hand to Aménis, and the Prince gave his to Zobéide.

‘Are you going anywhere for supper?’ said Zobéide to Angola.

‘I have made no arrangements yet,’ he answered in a whirl of emotions.

‘Aménis and Almaïr will surely take supper with us,’ she said, raising her voice.

‘Alas! I am so vexed at having to refuse,’ replied Aménis, ‘but the megrims are nearly killing me, and I feel shockingly stupid this evening. I am going home to mope on my sofa; besides which, I have only one carriage. Darling, what can we do about it?’

‘My own servants ought to be at the door,’ said Zobéide.

‘I will go and find out,’ said Almaïr, going out and returning in a minute to say that they had not yet arrived.

Zobéide pretended to be very vexed.

‘Really,’ she said, ‘it is most provoking. I should have loved you all to have come back with me this evening, but it seems almost impossible to arrange anything.’

‘It is all quite simple,’ said Almaïr. ‘I am afraid we cannot all spend the evening together; moreover, this lady,’ he continued, referring to Aménis, ‘is not at all well, and besides that she still wants me to clear up one or two points for her. She is

going to be kind enough to take me back in her *vis-à-vis*, and the Prince will do the same for you, I am sure.'

'Good-bye, sweetheart,' said Aménis to her. 'I am so annoyed at having to leave you.'

With these words she gave Almaïr her hand and got into her carriage, followed by him, and after taking leave of the Prince and Zobéide with a sly smile, they went away.

'How perfectly ridiculous!' said Zobéide, half angrily. 'Why could they not all come home? Really, they are most absurd. This place is quite intolerable' (they were standing at the entrance to a blind alley). 'Will you please take me home,' she added, addressing the Prince.

The Prince silently offered her his hand, which she pressed encouragingly. She stepped into his carriage and he followed her, after giving orders for them to be driven to Zobéide's house.

## Chapter IX

*Which shows that one can never be sure of anything.*

SEATED opposite Zobéide in his *vis-à-vis*, Angola found himself in a state of mind quite new to him and which he would have been hard put to it to analyse. Although he knew little of the proper way in which to conduct a *tête-à-tête*, he was nevertheless conscious of a delightful thrill, unlike anything that he had hitherto experienced, but which he was quite at a loss to know how to express. Still too young and too inexperienced to imagine that he had made any headway with his adventure, he was not even sure that he ought to speak openly of his love. It is true that the violence of his passions might have resulted in one of those strenuous and adventurous quarters of an hour in which the novice, by his very enthusiasm, is apt to be more dangerous to a lady than the most accomplished man of the world; but as Angola's own rapture was not backed by the determined attitude towards women which only comes with experience, the slightest primness either in looks or in words on the part of Zobéide, which would only have encouraged an experienced man, would have extinguished the Prince altogether, and made him lose any headway he might have made.

The position in which a man and a woman necessarily find themselves in conveyances of this sort has something voluptuous about it which makes the man more enterprising and the lady easier of conquest. Their knees and legs are intertwined; their faces, opposite and very close to one another, mutually reflect the warmth of passion which animates them. Screened from the rest of the world in an atmosphere of complete isolation, everything seems to favour passion and contributes to lessen timidity on one side and to banish all scruples on the other. A happily conceived invention, whose originator must have been one of Love's most pampered favourites! How many women there are who, after having resisted the most favourable opportunities, have gracefully succumbed in a *vis-à-vis*! How many lovers have owed their happiness to its voluptuous shape and the intimacy into which it has forced them! But Angola did not realize how favourable the situation was. He had not yet learnt the value of the coveted opportunity afforded by seeing a lady home, an opportunity which does more to forward the course of passion than a six months' courtship can do, owing to the fact that the first tentative steps, usually so difficult, are taken for one, and the tedious preliminaries through which one has

to pass to conquer carefully thought-out coquetry are necessarily passed over. But the Prince, unable to control his confusion, and not realizing his opportunity, could only carry on an aimless conversation with her which, however, flattered her more by the passion underlying it than the most persuasive eloquence would have done. His desires, curbed by his shyness, showed themselves in the quick eager intake of his breath: he pressed the hand that Zobéide absently abandoned to him; but he did not dare to be more enterprising, and was even a little frightened of his own hardihood in going so far; indeed, he was so afraid of offending her and employed the precious time to such small advantage that Zobéide began to wonder whether she ought not to be offended with him. At last they reached her house, he thinking that things were progressing very slowly, and she wondering how she could speed the adventure up without loss of dignity on her part.

Angola gave her his hand into her apartments, and as he would never have dared hope to take supper alone with her, and thought that the departure of Almaïr and Aménis made the party impossible, after a few general remarks he prepared to take his leave.

‘But why?’ said Zobéide. ‘Where can you go at



this time of night? I had hoped, it is true, to give you the company of Almaïr and Aménis, and I am exceedingly vexed about the way things have turned out, but you can at least have something to eat here; we will talk for a little while and you will permit me to send you away early. I am feeling far from well, and I am afraid I shall not be very amusing company for you, as I am terribly tired.'

She said this whilst tidying herself absently before a mirror. Then she lay down on her couch so as to lose none of the privileges of her ill-health.

'Sit down,' she said to Angola, pointing to an armchair placed opposite to her in such a way that none of the gracefulness which her attitude lent her should be lost on him. She lay there listlessly, making her ribbon bows for the sake of appearances. Her light and daring negligée gave him a view of part of her charms and seemed only to conceal the rest in order to make them more desirable. Her dress was open, and her bodice fastened by a ladder of pink ribbon in coquettish bows, revealed an adorable bosom, a perfection of curves and whiteness; her skirt, pulled up ever so little, either by the designs of fate or those of its owner, showed him a dainty, graceful foot, and the beginning of a pretty leg which gave the most favourable promise of more. The voluptuousness

of her attitude did nothing to hide the beauties of her figure: her soft and languorous glances, her spirited yet tender expression, revealed a wealth of passion which would have moved the coldest heart.

What, indeed, were the Prince's feelings at the sight of so much beauty? He felt an agitation which he did not understand master him so completely as to render him speechless. He cast glances on Zobéide in which desire and timidity struggled to gain the upper hand, but which he lowered hastily when they met her eyes, and his whole demeanour was dreamy and uneasy.

'I do not know,' said Zobéide, smiling at him tenderly, 'whether it is pity for my illness or the tedium of being with an invalid that makes you look so mournful. Whatever the cause, it is hardly the kind of remedy or relief I expected your presence to give me: my indisposition is partly due to the bustle of the Court, and I think that a sentimental conversation, full of confidences, with some one who attracts me would dissipate my vapours and restore me to my normal state of mind.'

'But, perhaps,' broke in Angola in a hesitating voice, 'the cure might prove fatal to whomever undertook it.'

‘I do not follow you,’ replied Zobéide, giving him a soft glance through lowered lashes, which is one of woman’s most dangerous weapons.

‘Ah, madam!’ cried the Prince passionately, ‘what human being could be fortunate enough to be chosen by you for such a dangerous conversation and remain unmoved by the confidence and affection of which you speak? And what misery he would be amassing for himself if, after accomplishing your cure, you were cruel enough to refuse to help him with his own!’

‘Gratitude often leads us farther than we think,’ replied Zobéide, ‘and our hearts often betray us so charmingly that we have not even the strength to reproach ourselves; but I cannot see why you take the trouble to imagine misfortunes against which I am sure you are quite proof, and with which, in any case, one could not sympathize without running all the risks inseparable from the shortcomings of youth.’

‘Who is more capable of dispelling my misfortunes than you!’ cried Angola. ‘Ah, madam! for pity’s sake do not add to the obstacles which terrify me: your indifference is quite formidable enough. My only claim to your pity is my passionate love for you.’

He threw himself at Zobéide’s feet. He was quite

beside himself and, as proof of his passion, down his cheeks coursed gentle tears, a touching and dangerous sign of emotion well calculated to melt the stoniest heart, and inevitably leading to happiness those who are fortunate enough to be able to give way to them at the right moment.

Zobéide was no less stirred than he: since going out into the world she had only witnessed the carefully rehearsed transports of the Court gallants, the sham passion of whom becomes unbearable so soon as one stops lending oneself to the illusion for a moment. She had never experienced any difficulty in defending her heart against seductions of this kind, the absurdity of which she felt so keenly. But this was an entirely new situation for her. The sincerity of the Prince's emotion, the candour running through all his tender protestations, the difficulty of resisting a true lover, the opportunity, all these things were against her. The sweet declaration which should decide their fate was trembling on his lips; the Prince was clasping her knees, and be it noted that this action, originally intended to be one of respect, does not always bear out that intention. His eyes were gradually being opened to the possibilities of the situation, when supper was announced. The Prince rose hurriedly, and after they

had both calmed down a little they sat down to table with the utmost self-possession, so as to avoid the curious glances and conjectures of the lackeys, an abominable breed who, in those days, spent most of their time in spying on their masters.

During supper they spoke only of matters of general interest. The Prince, who had not yet entirely rid himself of the effects of his simple, rough upbringing in his own country, ate like a true schoolboy, that is to say, everything and a lot of it. As for Zobéide, she behaved much better: she left all the good things, only eating entrails, the heads and feet of the birds, sucking-pig's trotters, and a very small helping of some sweet dish, and complained of indigestion, though at dessert she became more human over the champagne and the Barbadoes rum, grimacing prettily and pretending to find them horribly strong, but only for the sake of form. They spoke very little, and only in those half-finished sentences that one utters to relieve the constraint one feels in the presence of unwanted third parties.

When supper was over they left the table.

'Doubtless,' said Zobéide, 'you have ordered your carriage early; however delighted I am to have you with me, late nights are the death of me, and I really think I shall have to take a cure.'

‘All my own pleasure shall be sacrificed to yours,’ replied the Prince; ‘and although I do not think that my men will be long, if I had the least suspicion that my presence worried you, I should prefer . . .’

‘Oh, no! I assure you,’ interrupted Zobéide, ‘with such a modest young man as yourself one should have no fear of relaxing the decencies a little, but all young men are not like you.’

With these words they passed into a little room at the end of the apartment, more voluptuously furnished than any the Prince had hitherto seen. There were mirrors on every side, and on the panels were painted scenes of gallantry rendered with the most perfect taste; none of them hinted at the sorrows and misfortunes of love, which were banished, even in Art, from this abode of pleasure: everything was typical of happy and contented love. A couch set in an alcove and hung in rose and silver damask seemed like an altar consecrated to Love, and the remainder of the furniture was in perfect keeping with it: there were console and corner tables of jasper, Chinese cabinets full of the rarest porcelain, a mantelpiece covered with paunchy grotesques which were the last word in drollery, and patchwork screens made by Zobéide herself with the help of the cleverest men at Court.



All the candles were screened by green taffeta curtains which toned down their glare, leaving one in a twilight which seemed designed to shine upon the enterprises of love, or the obsequies of defeated virtue.

Zobéide lay down on the bed and the Prince placed himself in an armchair beside her.

‘How afraid I am, dear lady,’ he said to her timidly, ‘that your prejudice against young men is unqualified and admits of no exception! But it would be unfair to class me with them. My feelings for you deserve a consideration which I cannot hope to secure by my qualities alone.’

‘I did not profess,’ said Zobéide, ‘to condemn them all: such a sweeping assertion would be ridiculous, and I am far from wanting to make it; it is true that as a rule they are to be distrusted, that they spoil each other by their bad example, that it has become fashionable for them nowadays to behave badly toward women, to hold them in contempt and to refer to them in the most outrageous and offensive terms; so that any young man who has had occasion from his own experience to be convinced of the fallacy of such procedure is obliged carefully to disguise from his fashionable friends a habit of thought that would lay him open to the accusation of being awkward

and inexperienced. In fact, these young men only admit the existence of virtue in order to have the satisfaction of destroying it wherever they go; though this virtue must indeed be very frail to be continually vanquished by such adversaries.

‘I will confess to you,’ she went on, ‘that in you I have recognized a depth of candour and sincerity which convinces me that you are immune from these fashionable depravities. There is an innate truthfulness in the way you express yourself which attracts me and disposes me to trust you; and if I dared . . .’

She shielded her eyes with her hand to hide a charming confusion.

‘Why do you stop?’ cried the delighted Prince. ‘Why, dear lady, do you leave me in such cruel suspense? Cannot the warmth of my feelings earn from you an avowal that can mean nothing but my happiness? Finish what you were saying: speak to me, if it be only a single word,’ he went on, falling on his knees and pressing a thousand burning kisses on her hands. ‘Will you not bring happiness to a Prince who adores you and who can never be happy unless his love is most tenderly returned?’

‘What do you ask, ungrateful wretch?’ murmured Zobéide. ‘What more do you want? What

better proof of my affection for you do you require than the delight with which I accept the declaration of your own?’

‘Do you regret it?’ asked the Prince anxiously. ‘Alas! happiness is still far away whilst your heart is so full of doubts.’

‘You do not believe that!’ cried Zobéide, carried away by her passion, and pressing the Prince’s head lovingly to her bosom; ‘my heart is yours; if only I could be mistress of your own, how joyfully would the days pass for us in our perfect love, growing sweeter every moment.’

As she spoke she leant towards the Prince, who, certain now of her love, gathered an ardent kiss upon her lips. Presently, in a delicious turmoil, he sank down beside her. Zobéide was clad in the lightest of negligées, and the least movement on her part revealed fresh beauties to his eyes. The enraptured Prince shyly caressed her unresisting bosom, so lovely, so white and firm, so subtly curved and so divinely soft! Gaining courage, he ventured to press his lips where his hands had dared to stray, and untrammelled to enjoy charms worthy of the gods themselves.

‘Enough, dear Prince!’ cried Zobéide; ‘do not take advantage of my weakness; even the ardour of my love for you cannot make me yield my

virtue so soon; time and your tenderness towards me may lead you to a happiness for which I do not forbid you to hope, but of which I must not think. Spare me now, I implore you!’

The Prince, rapt in a fervour of bliss, paid no heed to her. She herself, a prey to the most distracting emotions, was in a ferment of irresolution. At one moment, carried away by her ardour, she clung to him and lavished the most loving caresses on him; but when the Prince, emboldened by such unmistakable signs of passion, became more venturesome, remorse regained the upper hand and made her push him fiercely from her.

In their agitation they had taken so little heed of appearances that Zobéide, who, as has been said, was very lightly clad, exhibited to the Prince’s gaze that lovely leg, a foretaste of which had been his before supper and which he now saw in all its beauty. So few were now the obstacles between him and an unhampered view of all her allurements that he speedily surmounted them. Heavens! What loveliness! Imagination could suggest nothing more perfect: never has Venus possessed a shrine more worthy of her. The Prince, lost in the rapture of the moment and beside himself with love, could only stammer a few disjointed phrases. All his faculties were devoted to

lavishing caresses on the divine beauty surrendered to him, as though incredulous that such perfection could really exist and could grace a human being.

Zobéide, herself a prey to passion, no longer had the strength to deny him anything: she shared his transports and overwhelmed him with her soft caresses. However, when she realized that he was determined to press home his victory, a tiny spark of virtue urged her still to resist. His intentions no longer admitted of any doubt. Complete master of her charms and of herself by the situation in which they found themselves, his shyness had given place to a passion that brooked of no denial.

‘Dear Prince,’ she said, almost inaudibly, ‘Enough . . . What are you doing? Do not take advantage of my love for you . . . Is this the humble devotion which you have sworn for me? Leave me! You are cruel.’

The Prince’s ardour prevented her from saying more as he smothered her words in passionate kisses.

And, indeed, he appeared to be reaching the zenith of his happiness: his voice was beginning to fail him, and he was at the threshold of the sweet goal of all his desires, when he noticed that Zobéide seemed bereft of all feeling and was plunged in a deep swoon. Fear succeeded his joy.

He called to her several times without result: she betrayed no sign of life. Alarmed by her condition, and too ignorant of the ways of the world to know the proper course to pursue when ladies swoon in such circumstances, he held a bottle of Lamotte's golden drops under her nose, but without any effect. Then, really terrified, after repairing as well as he was able the disorder in her toilet occasioned by his recent excitement, he pulled the bell, and immediately some of her women came in, to whom he appealed to attend to her. Restoratives were brought, and under their influence Zobéide gradually regained consciousness. The first object that met her gaze was the Prince, who was eagerly lending his aid to bring her round. She ordered her women to prepare her for the night, and turning to Angola, said petulantly:

'Pray do not let me detain you further. Your inability to do anything for me when we were alone makes me inclined to doubt your powers. You do not seem to be very expert at attending to a swooning woman; you will, nevertheless, find that it is a very useful knowledge to have at Court. As a friend I advise you to acquire it as soon as possible: you may come and let me know what progress you make.'

The Prince's carriage was announced, and he



left Zobéide without replying, realizing too late his stupidity, and went home furious with himself for having let such a golden opportunity go by unseized.

## Chapter X

### *An unforeseen adventure.*

THE next day the Prince appeared at the Queen's levee. One of the first people he saw was Almaïr, who, coming up to him, said merrily:

‘Might one inquire about the result of your conversation? The arguments you used did not, I understand, chill the penitent's ardour?’

The Prince received this sally with embarrassment and constraint.

‘What is this?’ asked Almaïr. ‘Why do you look so dubious? I hope that an ill-timed discretion is not making you hide your affairs from me; you can rely on me and can be quite sure that I shall break every rule of Court etiquette by keeping your secret and by proving to you my desire, if that is necessary, that your intrigue should be successful; for I cannot think that Zobéide played the prude, or that in a fit of untimely obstinacy wanted you to pay too dearly for favours which are only precious when they are granted spontaneously and as a compliment, and which lose their value and become mere duties when they can only be exacted by persistence.’

‘No, my dear Almaïr,’ said the Prince, ‘it is not an ill-timed discretion on my part, nor any ground

of complaint against Zobéide that throws me into the confusion in which you see me. You have divined the trend of my affections, and in doing so you have only guessed my need of some one like yourself in whom to confide. I want your advice on a great many things which perplex me; for I have only myself to blame, and you see me baffled by the most annoying adventure which could have happened to me.'

Thereupon he described his supper with Zobéide, the love which she had shown for him, the passion which he himself had displayed, the way in which she had resisted him, her affectionate indecision, and finally her swoon; the uselessness of his efforts to revive her which had compelled him to call in her maids, and her remarks to him before he left her.

'What a miserable performance!' cried Almaïr when he had finished. 'How could anyone be as callow as that? Good heavens! A pretty woman loves you, tells you so when you are alone with her, lavishes caresses on you, begs you to go no farther, and then kindly swoons in your arms, and you do not take advantage of it! What more do you want? Do you realize that since woman has existed she has perhaps devised no better scheme, and that one cannot sufficiently admire her sense of

management in this device? I am not at all surprised at Zobéide's anger, for nothing is so irritating to a pretty woman as to swoon for nothing. She is now thoroughly displeased with you: however, we will try to put the matter right; but do take a lesson from it, so that whenever a woman faints again for your benefit you may know how to apply the proper remedies; otherwise you will disgrace yourself hopelessly in the eyes of them all.'

Angola admitted his error with a good grace, and received a lesson on the important point of swoonings, after which he determined to make a very careful study of women, so as not to fail them on other occasions. Almaïr and he then went to pay their court to the Fairy, who was at her toilet. She received them with her usual graciousness and looked keenly at the Prince.

'You disappeared very suddenly yesterday,' she said. 'No doubt the Opera wearied you, or perhaps Almaïr found something more amusing for you to do.'

'One has not the courage always to do what one most wants to,' replied Angola, 'and the fear of bothering you made me take supper with Almaïr, after which we spent the evening in talking of many things about which I am anxious to learn.'

'I admire your modesty and your eagerness to

acquire knowledge,' said Scintilla; 'but you must not confine yourself to the customs of the Court in this respect: there are certain things,' she went on, drawing nearer to him, 'which it is much more pleasant to know and which you will learn when you show yourself worthy of such confidence.'

The Prince, who was always susceptible to the charms of the person with whom he happened to be, and from whose heart the Fairy's beauty banished the memory of Zobéide, was about to give a fervent answer to such an encouraging speech, but the Fairy, who did not think the place suitable, raised her voice and made the conversation general.

The day passed in the usual uninterrupted amusements of this happy Court. In the evening Scintilla played cards, and the Prince, whose natural diffidence prevented him from taking part, sat behind the Fairy's chair whilst the game was in progress. The strategic position which he thus took up gave him an admirable view of the most adorable beauties, which the Fairy made no effort to hide from him. On the contrary, by leaning towards him she displayed to him such charms that he gradually recovered all the enthusiasm that was due to them. She was quite aware of the impression she was making on the Prince, and,

fearing to be forestalled by some beauty at her Court, she decided not to postpone any further her intention of being the first person to teach him the secrets of love.

After the game she went in to supper accompanied by Angola.

‘I want you to come to my apartments this evening,’ she said, ‘as there is a book which has just been published, which I want you to read with me. I am curious to see if you will recognize its beauty.’

‘If it treats of love,’ answered the Prince, ‘I do not want to learn my lessons from it: I know other masters . . .’

‘Hush!’ said the Fairy, covering his mouth with her hand; ‘if you are really so anxious to learn, perhaps I may find some one who will undertake to teach you, if you promise to combine great docility in your lessons with the utmost discretion in not discussing them afterwards. I shall know how far you are to be relied on when the time and the opportunity occur.’

This ended the conversation, and she sat down to supper. During supper, Scintilla kept casting glances at the Prince which even the least conceited man would have interpreted to his advantage. Past-mistress of the art of dainty coquetry,



she led him, as it were step by step, to divine her feelings for him, and to spare him the trouble of himself making advances. With anyone more worldly-wise than Angola she would have run the risk of making his conquest seem less precious by making it too easy for him; but her encouragement, though very definite, even now did not show the Prince the direction in which his happiness lay with sufficient clearness to embolden him to brave anything to grasp it. After supper the Fairy dismissed her Court. When she was about to return to her apartments, the Prince offered her his hand to lead her there, which seemed to displease and surprise her.

‘But what is this?’ she said. ‘Are you not going with the others? But, by the way, I have a message for you from the King your father, so I will let you remain a few moments.’

At these words, all the courtiers dispersed, and she turned towards her private apartments.

Scintilla leant affectionately on the Prince’s arm. Her beauty was so moving that Angola, carried away as always by the person in whose presence he was, and mastered by his desires, forgot Zobeïde and devoted himself entirely to the object that seemed to offer itself to him. Impelled by a fresh emotion, he could not prevent himself from

pressing her hand with a sigh; but he was immediately terrified at his boldness, and hurriedly lowered his eyes, fearful of meeting those of the Fairy, and of reading reproof for his temerity in them. However, he soon plucked up courage to look at her again, and saw in her eyes, instead of the disapproval he dreaded, a tender expression which seemed to be full of promise, and they reached the Fairy's apartments in that troubled state of two hearts that have already guessed each other's feelings and are eagerly looking for an opportunity of declaring their mutual love.

It was to her private apartments that the Fairy retired with the Prince. This charming place was reserved for those exquisite and carefully chosen occasions on which monarchs like to strip themselves of their dignity and place themselves, in the interest of their pleasure, on a level with those whom they admit there; it was here that Scintilla spent the most pleasant hours of her life. The turmoil of the Court was banished from this place, and only a few favoured people, the ministers of her secret pleasures, were ever admitted; everything in it radiated voluptuousness. There was more taste than splendour in its decoration, which was carried out with the utmost care. It consisted of a suite of charming little rooms which seemed

to have been conceived with the idea of indicating all the different stages of pleasure for which they were destined: the first, devoted to the pleasures of the table, was filled with a delicate profusion of everything that the daintiest appetite could desire; another, devoted to the pleasures of music, was ornamented with all the trophies of this exquisite amusement, and contained all those delightful instruments whose harmony seduces the soul and urges it to a still gentler passion; this was the chamber of enthrallment; and the last room was devoted to the pleasures of love, and was, as it were, the Holy of holies. It was to this room that the Fairy and the Prince made their way.

Could any heart be so indifferent as to resist so importunate an opportunity? Everything in this perilous place seemed to cry out for love. The luxurious furniture possessed a passionate character difficult to describe: mirrors, couches, arm-chairs and sofas, all seemed forcibly to call attention to the purpose for which they were destined. Stools, which are the children of deference, were banished from this charming place where love levelled all. The Fairy, by throwing off all constraint, hoped that the freedom of their *tête-à-tête* would mitigate the majesty of the throne and give the Prince courage. For indeed the place, the

hour, the tenderness of the Queen, all should have opened his eyes to the happiness awaiting him; but, little used to adventures of this sort, if he hoped to succeed at all it was only by picturing to himself a long courtship, the best part of which a little experience would have saved him.

Scintilla lay down on her sofa.

'This,' she said to the Prince, 'is the book of which I spoke to you. The situations in it are, they tell me, very interesting. The author knows all about the human heart and plays skilfully on all its strings. Love is treated delicately in it and, without tedious delays, the lover knows how to choose his moment and takes his happiness so opportunely that his mistress has neither time nor desire to reproach herself for her weakness.'

'What a lucky man!' cried the Prince hesitatingly, 'and how much such an enviable situation makes one feel the terrible contrast of that of a man who loves with a hopeless passion, and whose lips are sealed by respect.'

'I imagined,' said Scintilla, 'that such a stubborn respect no longer existed except in the story of Cassandra. In these days it becomes absurd when it is pushed beyond ordinary bounds: only the most extreme youth can excuse it at all. Young men are not as a rule quite incurable in this

respect; in any case, it is not flattering to a woman: apart from the fact that it is not always the sentiment she wants to inspire most, it is more often induced by shyness than by anything else, and in that case a woman loses everything on the one hand, without her vanity being able to compensate her on the other.

‘I do not imagine, for instance,’ she continued, ‘that if you had a tender feeling for anyone, you would be so unfriendly to yourself as to preserve an obstinate silence, which might even become an insult to a woman, as it might appear that you wanted to force her to make advances to you herself.’

‘I would advise no one to envy the situation in which I find myself,’ replied the Prince, ‘and my audacity is perhaps so great that the very thing that might encourage another man becomes useless in my case because of a difference in rank which terrifies me without being able to cure me.’

‘Let us see,’ said the Fairy, opening the book; ‘perhaps we shall find some situation or some piece of advice here to take a lesson from. I am really concerned about your case, and I am very anxious for you to find some remedy for your troubles. It may be that the remedy is easier than

you think, and that it is only your persistent silence that is the cause of it.'

'I should be speedily punished for having spoken,' said the Prince, 'and bitter repentance would follow swiftly on the heels of my unavailing rashness.'

'But that is childish,' said the Fairy, gazing tenderly at him; 'will you never get over this exaggerated bashfulness of yours? For, after all, what can be the object of it? I cannot believe that you are so conceited as to imagine that you would be humiliating yourself by declaring the state of your feelings to the lady who inspires them, neither must you get it into your head that any woman could regard such a declaration as so bitter an outrage as to appear to her to be absolutely unpardonable. It happens only too often that women (some of them, at any rate) receive good-naturedly enough declarations of this sort from men who are the least attractive to them, and even though this is not always the case, it should at any rate diminish in your eyes the difficulties of an undertaking which your attitude of mind has made you think quite impracticable.

'But,' she continued, 'if you really cannot make up your mind to declare your heart to the lady who has so fascinated you, you can at least confide



in me: I might be able to give you some useful advice, and even to say a word in praise of your constancy and reticence to the lady for whom you are sighing; in short, I might be able to spare you an avowal which seems so formidable to you.'

'Why do you take pleasure in tormenting me?' said the Prince. 'That is not the sort of confidence I want to make to you; and besides, how could you pledge yourself to say things to some one else which I expect you would receive indignantly were they addressed to yourself?'

'That is a point of view of which I should never have suspected you,' said the Queen, 'and I do not see why you should drag my feelings into a matter which I cannot think concerns me. But let us look at this book,' she added; 'perhaps we will both be able to benefit from it, in finding a way for you to extricate yourself from such an embarrassing situation, and for me to make you more sincere and less evasive.'

The Prince sighed with disappointment at seeing the execution of his designs postponed again, and began to read. The situations in the book were interesting, the style was good, the incidents bore the stamp of probability and were well displayed; especially was the story of the two lovers described in the most seductive colours: they were thoroughly

happy and spoke to each other simply and charmingly of their love without any of the interminable and tedious farrago of old romances. The Prince sighed again as he thought of how fortunate they were. His voice faltered and the colour rose to his cheeks: he interrupted the reading without noticing that he did so, to gaze fervently at the Fairy, from whose eyes he seemed to derive fresh ardour. The Fairy was quite aware of his distress, which only increased her own agitation.

‘How fortunate they are!’ cried the Prince, ‘and how they deserve to be envied!’

‘How can you envy a fate,’ retorted the Fairy, ‘which you have not the courage to bring on yourself? I still cannot drag this all-important secret from you; and yet my attitude towards you should surely make you treat me with more confidence.’

‘Ah, madam!’ cried Angola, ‘the feelings of my heart are perhaps more violent than you realize. It is this very attitude of yours towards me, this attitude at once so charming and so perilous for my peace of mind, which is the cause of my bewilderment . . . Only you can cure my troubles . . .’

‘Why do you always bring me into them?’ interrupted Scintilla, ‘when apparently they are in

no way connected with myself? But you possess certain claims on my friendship, which dispose me to help you with the lady who is to be the object of your declaration.'

'How relentlessly you show me by your care in avoiding it,' said the Prince, 'how little flattered you would be were it addressed to you!'

'Let us have done with vain conjectures,' said the Fairy; 'my own feelings in such a case would, I imagine, be a matter of complete indifference to you, and besides, it is impossible for me to give a definite answer to a vague supposition which has nothing to do with facts.'

'Well then,' said the Prince, overcome by his passion and throwing himself on his knees beside her, 'I will confess everything boldly. It is you who are the object of the timid declaration which I have not dared to make; yours is the heart to whose love I have so rashly aspired, and only your love can make my life happy; have pity on me and forgive a fault of which I cannot repent myself; my crime is only one in your eyes, and it is there that I want to read my forgiveness.'

He clasped the Fairy's knees as he spoke: there was passion in his face and all his movements were animated by the utmost tenderness. His declaration was too evidently sincere not to make an

impression on a heart which by good fortune was already prejudiced in his favour. Scintilla was in that delightful state of mind of a woman who sees the goal of her desires before her, after having almost despaired of ever reaching it. The Prince's love, his emotion, in fact everything about him, enchanted her. She looked on them as her own handiwork, and received them with that graciousness which one usually shows towards anything whose main object one considers oneself to be. Relieved of the burden of his declaration, happier than he dared hope at finding that the Fairy was not angry with him, but was listening patiently to the recital of his passion, and fearing to spoil his chances by precipitation, the Prince kept a check upon his passion, and not daring to abandon himself to its violence, contented himself with covering with kisses the charming hands which she abandoned as though absent-mindedly to his transports.

The Fairy, seeing his irresolution, and not wishing to give him any more marked encouragement, which might have the effect of cooling his passion, hit on the expedient, which never fails in its effect on young men, of revealing to them those hidden charms of which their youthful imagination has only given them a feeble picture, and which affect

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them all the more because they are so unaccustomed to adventures of this kind: a clever manœuvre which uproots the most stubborn shyness, to make way for that ardent and uncontrollable passion which is one of the most charming faults of their age.

## Chapter XI

### *Payment of the Royal Dues. The end of the noviciate.*

‘I AM dying of fatigue,’ she said to him. ‘My sofa is uncomfortable and irritates me; I do not want to send you away, as it is early yet and I still have a great many things to say to you; if you do not mind, I will retire to my bed, as I think I shall be more comfortable there. You may stay a few moments by my bedside: I am very anxious that we should not separate before you have cleared up several points which interest me and which I think it essential for me to know.’

She rang the bell, and one of her maids came in, whom she told to prepare her for the night.

The Prince moved tactfully to the door.

‘Oh, you need not go away,’ she said to him, mischievously; ‘I will be careful not to shock your modesty: there are ways of doing these things which baffle the most indiscreet glances.’

The Prince, who in pretending to go would have been very disappointed at being taken at his word, did not wait to be asked twice.

‘Do not think,’ continued Scintilla, ‘that I am putting you under any great obligation to me. Such restrictions can be placed on a favour of this



kind that it ceases to be a matter for self-congratulation.'

She said this standing before a pier-glass, whilst undoing the ribboned lattice of her stays which, now completely loosed, revealed the beauty of a lovely bosom more white than snow, and moulded to perfection, and which, in contrast to that of three-quarters of the Court ladies, was upheld by nature and its own firmness, without the aid of any of those devices which, more than any modesty, prevent men from assisting at many a lady's toilet.

Scintilla could see, reflected in her mirror, the disturbance the sight of her charms caused to the Prince, and to increase his fervour by making them more difficult to see, she pretended to be vexed that they should remain uncovered even for an instant, and quickly pulled her tucker over them, though she knew it would not remain in place by itself. Presently she let it go so that she might arrange her hair, and once more let the Prince gaze on the charms that had so fascinated him.

Her maid began to take off her shoes. She sat on a sofa, turning her back to Angola to make a show of hiding a dainty foot and leg from him; then, under pretext of speaking to him, she turned

towards him, as though forgetting her precautions; a moment later, in feigned confusion for her blunder, she hurriedly turned back again. She moved to her bedside to fetch her nightdress, and as though reassured by the shadows there, although quite aware that she was not really hidden from the Prince, she spent her time so well and was so careful of her movements that, without letting it appear intentional, she gave the Prince an abundant view of a perfect body and of allurements upon which until then the eye of man had never fallen. She then got into bed and had her table and her candlesticks brought beside it.

‘We must finish our reading,’ she said to the Prince, ‘so you have my permission to remain for a few minutes.’ Then turning to her maid: ‘See if the Prince’s carriage has arrived,’ she said, ‘and tell his men to wait.’

The maid left the room, and she bade the Prince sit by her bedside.

Angola was in a condition of mind difficult to describe; he looked restlessly at the Fairy and at the jealous veils that hid from him three parts of her charms.

‘You must admit that I am very kind,’ she said to him, ‘to keep you here at this hour: it shows how greatly I count on your discretion; for to be

alone in such circumstances with a man of your age is very compromising for me. We have not finished our reading, but I really think we had better leave it. We were approaching the *dénouement*, which promised to be a very moving one and not at all calculated to inspire you with the deferential attitude which I want you to preserve towards me.'

'Might there not be a still better lesson to be learnt from it?' asked the Prince, 'and am I not allowed to hope to put it into practice one day?'

'Very well then, read it,' replied the Fairy; 'your curiosity is becoming intolerable, and I do not know where you have learnt all the extravagant things you say to me, and which I might even be good enough to believe.'

After reading a few pages he came to the climax: it was a lively situation where two lovers, alone together and sure of their mutual tenderness, were giving each other very definite proofs of it. The story was too well told not to have an effect on Angola. He was beside himself with excitement and read in a halting voice, whilst continually allowing his eyes to stray towards Scintilla in a way that left no doubt as to the nature of his emotions.

The Fairy, pretending to feel the heat, threw

aside the bed-clothes, and revealed herself to him in all her ravishing beauty.

‘What a blissful position for those two lovers, dear lady,’ said the Prince in a trembling voice: ‘the girl, satisfied with her lover’s sincerity, no longer repels him; the happy lover does what he will, covering with kisses the dainty hands which she abandons to his transports.’

At the same time the Prince, suiting the action to the word, covered the Fairy’s hands with his own kisses.

‘With sweet assurance,’ continued Angola, ‘he dares take from his lady’s lips still less uncertain pledges of her love.’

With which the Prince, carried away by the force of example, made bold to press his lips to those of the Fairy, and to gather soft kisses from them, only meeting with a resistance that made the final victory more precious.

‘Still unsatisfied,’ the Prince read on, ‘his lady’s bosom next drew his attention.’

And immediately faithful to his model, the Prince threw himself on his knees and covered the Fairy’s alabaster bosom with his eager caresses.

Angola was making remarkable progress in his imitations. The fidelity with which he followed the lesson before him brought him insensibly

nearer and nearer to his goal. The Fairy, mastered by her passion, was herself weak enough to respond to his transports: she abandoned all her charms to him, or, if she withheld any it was only to allure him by others still more exquisite. Angola forgot his book, and Scintilla did not trouble to remind him of it. Having profited by the lessons which he had begun so well to put into practice, and having a very good idea of the end to which they were leading, he now relied on his own instinct to guide his actions. Scintilla protested but feebly against his familiarities! Fortunate Angola! Delicious preludes to the sweetest of all pleasures!

In the turmoil, the veils that still hid the Fairy's charms disappeared one by one, until the whole beauty of her form lay before his eyes. Master of the situation, he was at a loss to know what to praise most. Little accustomed to such victories, he knew better how to conquer than to taste the joys of conquest.

His love, however, soon showed him his power, and what was lacking to complete it. The Road to Happiness lay open to him.

'Dear Prince,' said the Queen in a smothered voice, 'you see how much I love you. How I hope you are worthy of it and that you will love me

always! Though I do not for a moment doubt your love for me. Alas! I can no longer resist you.' And she fell swooning into the Prince's arms.

It seemed as though Love had gathered all his choicest flowers to strew upon this charming pair. These two lovers, in their enviable bliss, for a long time only expressed their feelings for each other in the languor of their eyes. But soon they began once more to lavish tender caresses on each other, mingled with loving words in which mutual confidence and love replaced their erstwhile shyness and constraint. They confided to each other those loving thoughts that share the time with the sweetest pleasures and which are, perhaps, as fascinating as the pleasures themselves.

At last Scintilla, who was always careful of appearances, saw by her clock that it was nearly four, the hour when gentlefolk are wont to retire to rest; so she bade the Prince farewell, and he returned home quite overjoyed at his first adventure, and determined not to let the matter rest there.



## Chapter XII

### *A quick change and the payment of a debt.*

THIS unexpected adventure produced in some ways a great change in the Prince. Enlightened by his success as to the way to behave when similar opportunities arose, he was no longer fearful of missing any by his own fault. He spent the remainder of the night in judicious reflections which developed the seeds that had been sown in his mind. His timidity disappeared, and he promised himself faithfully that he would rather go to the other extreme than fall back into his earlier error. This happy state of mind seemed to add a new grace to his charms. At Court next morning he appeared calm and contented, which the Fairy regarded as a good sign. She made several little affectionate signs to him and cast meaning glances in his direction, to which he replied with an air which showed a marvellous natural aptitude for mastering the art of the highest forms of affectation. Almaïr also noticed his greater ease of manner and, inwardly attributing it to his own lessons, approached him and said:

‘You seem in excellent humour to-day; may I hope that you will be good enough to tell us the

cause of this serenity, to which hitherto you have not accustomed us?’

‘The novelty of everything,’ replied the Prince gaily, ‘rather overpowered me at first. I am gradually growing used to it: the ways of this Court please and enchant me, and until I become proficient in them I am enjoying myself immensely as an onlooker.’

‘We ought to congratulate ourselves,’ Almaïr replied, ‘at having acquired such a worthy proselyte and, unless I am much mistaken, with such a distinct vocation you will soon be in a position to convert others. But where have you been all this time? I never saw you the whole of yesterday: it was quite impossible to find you, though I searched for you at all the entertainments and in all the usual haunts. Doubtless in some delightful and secluded spot you were rehearsing with some new and charming lady the lessons you have to learn for Zobéide, and were probing the problem to its very depths with a view to atoning thoroughly for your past faults!’

‘I assure you,’ said Angola, abashed by such a pointed sally, ‘that your own lessons have been quite sufficient to correct my unpardonable faults. My day yesterday was spent in the most humdrum manner. I attended the Queen’s supper, after

which she took me into her apartments for a moment to give me a message concerning the King my father, and dismissed me early. I went home and spent the evening trying to think out a way to make Zobéide forget my awkwardness and to regain by my efforts those precious favours which I have lost by my own fault.'

'Listen to me,' said Almaïr, looking keenly at him. 'I am not trying to discover the nature of the confidence that the Queen could have had to make to you, nor what secret business was so pressing as to make her choose such a strange hour for receiving you alone in her apartments. I also admit that a discretion which would be absurd between friends in respect of any other woman might well be maintained when it deals with ladies in such high quarters; but without probing into the nature of your intimacy with the Queen, I must impress on you that nothing can justify your breaking with Zobéide until she has reason to be pleased with you, and you have made amends to her for the grievous insult you have put upon her. I have made it a personal matter, and it would be very tiresome of you not to do your duty on the next occasion.'

'You will always find me,' said the Prince, smiling, 'ready to do all I can to re-establish my

reputation. I shall be delighted to owe the opportunity of doing so to yourself, and I promise to seize it with a fervour of which she will have no cause to complain.'

'Nothing could be simpler,' said Almaïr; 'after the Queen's dinner we will go and eat at my house, after which we will join the evening promenade, where she is certain to be with her friend Aménis.'

'Why do you not say *your* friend?' interrupted Angola. 'I am sure that is no more than her due.'

'Aménis,' said Almaïr flippantly, 'is a lady who deserves a certain consideration which I would not dream of refusing her; but my passion for her is a calm one which does not blind me to the attractions of other women.'

'That is precisely the kind of passion in which I want henceforth to indulge,' said the Prince; 'to my mind they are less creditable, but without any doubt very much more convenient than real attachments.'

'I entirely agree with you,' said Almaïr, 'and I am really delighted to see how quickly you are arriving at the right frame of mind.'

They were still talking in this vein when the Queen's dinner was announced; when it was over,

they betook themselves to Almaïr's house, where they dined and afterwards continued their conversation for some time. Almaïr gave the Prince further advice, which did not a little to instruct him in the ways of the world, and to strengthen him in his new system of life.

With the arrival of the evening promenade hour they stepped into their carriage and drove off. The day was drawing to a close when they arrived, and it was then that the great avenue was at its gayest; for although it had been pleasant walking for at least two hours, it was hardly the proper thing to get there any sooner. The avenue presented a charming picture with its variegated crowd of people of both sexes in their gayest and most gorgeous trappings. On the one hand were the little coquettish ladies dressed in the very last word of fashion, tottering under their aigrettes, their ear-rings and their masses of diamonds, to say nothing of their rouge. They walked four abreast, their paniers blocking the whole avenue, with a childish air of unconcern, carelessly nodding their acknowledgement of the deep bows that were made them on all sides; on the other hand, as a contrast, one saw another kind of women, who came to make a parade of their boredom or their bad health. They were in low-cut dresses, the

skirts of which were a mass of furbelows, and were short enough to reveal their dainty feet shod in white slippers, hinting at legs which seemed to promise something extremely seductive; they had workbags at their waists and lap dogs beneath their arms; their hair was worn well forward, and there was little colour on their faces; in fact, everything was carefully arranged to be in keeping with their afternoon toilettes.

There were also many of those 'antivestals', walking tributes to the lubricity of business men, who came to show off their decrepit charms and to fasten to their chariot wheels a few youths who went home with them to chaff them, and so on, only to finish up by ridiculing them.

All these different groups were ceaselessly hampered and jostled by bands of giddy young men who marched along at a great pace, head in air, elbowing every one out of their way, staring boldly at all the women, boasting of the favours of some of them and belittling those of the others. They were constantly greeting people with a condescension which made them appear more impertinent than ever. They planned a thousand suppers and a thousand parties that would never take place, at the top of their voices, and went on walking about until nine o'clock at night, full of



importance and mystery, eventually going away still more mysteriously to spend the rest of the evening in boredom in their own rooms.

Amongst this vast crowd of idlers, Angola and Almaïr caught sight of Zobéide and Aménis. They made their way to them and talked with them for some time about the people around them. At last the Prince drew close to Zobéide and whispered to her:

‘You see before you a repentant criminal, madam, who is determined to leave no stone unturned to earn forgiveness.’

‘I should be quite prepared to forgive you,’ replied Zobéide with a tender smile, ‘did I not fear that in so doing I might expose myself to fresh affronts.’

‘My behaviour will prove to you the eagerness I feel to make amends,’ continued Angola; ‘and until the time arrives I beg of you once again to bear in mind the claims of such a tender love as mine.’

No more was said. A lady and gentleman of fashion cannot carry on a sustained conversation for fear of being mistaken for a citizen taking a walk abroad with his wife. People of quality only talk to each other in monosyllables, parting and coming together again a dozen times whilst doing

so. Everything, even old age, took on an air of frivolity and dissipation in resorts of this kind.

At nightfall, after strolling once or twice round the fountain, the crowd melted away. Zobéide and Aménis remained behind until the end with Almaïr and the Prince.

‘What shall we do, my Beauties?’ cried Almaïr. ‘How shall we spend the evening?’

‘The simplest thing,’ said Zobéide, ‘would be for you to come and have supper with me, to make up for the failure of the other day.’

‘Oh! but,’ said Almaïr, ‘that is too obvious a thing to do; besides, it is such a lovely evening and I should suffocate if I shut myself up.’

‘Why should we not go and have supper in the country?’ said the Prince.

‘To be sure!’ said Almaïr; ‘are we not in the country already? The swing-bridge will soon be shut and we shall be here alone and unhindered; who is to prevent us from having supper at the Lodge and passing a most delightful night here?’

‘You could not have suggested anything nicer,’ said Aménis; and Almaïr went off to dismiss their carriages and to order supper.

He returned very shortly, and they were soon quite alone. Almaïr, with a view to assisting the Prince, and having affairs of his own to conduct

with Aménis, fell unobtrusively back with her and took another path. He had already arranged in whispers with the Prince, that at a given signal they should all meet at the Lodge, and they were soon swallowed up in the shadows lurking in the pathways.

‘I do not know,’ said Zobéide to the Prince, ‘why I abandon myself to your care with so much confidence.’

‘Ah, madam!’ broke in the Prince, ‘what can you be afraid of from a lover who adores you? You have no confusion to fear save that which he wants to share with you himself!’

Their conversation became more and more animated, and finally took on a very decided note of tenderness. The place, the hour, their isolation, and the opportunity, all encouraged the Prince to hope for forgiveness, and all urged Zobéide to allow him to earn it.

After they had been walking for some time, Zobéide sank down on to the grass, pleading fatigue, and the Prince sat down beside her. He sighed, and she became deeply agitated. He kissed her unresisting hands, her lips, her neck, her bosom. Zobéide resisted him just enough to add to his pleasure and not to deny it, until in the end she abandoned herself to him completely and to

his heart's content. And Zobéide was far from being unmoved herself, her efforts to diminish his victory placing the seal upon their bliss.

The Prince was too vigorously in love with her to let the matter end there. His affection for her seemed to increase at every moment, and they passed some hours together in continued happiness that made the time seem all too short. At last they heard the signal arranged by Almaïr for supper, and made their way to the Lodge.

They found Almaïr and Aménis waiting for them. The delicate glow on Zobéide's face, and the triumphant expression on that of the Prince, apprised Almaïr of their adventure. An inquiring glance cast at the Prince confirmed his conjectures; and as he regarded the affair as his own handiwork, he did not even indulge in those innocent sallies which are permissible in cases of this sort in certain society. Supper was delicious and extremely animated; the women were charming. They sang, drank champagne and finished up with ices. They remained seated at table for a long time, only getting up to go into the gardens again.

'What time did you order our carriages?' asked Zobéide of Almaïr.

'Quite early,' he answered seriously; 'they will be here at four in the morning.'

‘What folly!’ said Zobéide. ‘We shall have to spend the night here. Really there is an inconsistency about your actions which is beyond all patience.’

With these words she let herself be led away by the Prince, who drew her gradually apart from the other two.

Who can describe the delights of that happy night? Every bower in the garden was a witness to their love. How tenderly they loved each other, until they were interrupted by the break of day! The party reassembled and they all went their separate ways, after promising to meet again; and the Prince went home well pleased with his efforts and more than ever resolved to continue his journey on such a pleasant path.

## PART II

### Chapter I

*A pleasant remedy to employ against boredom.*

ANGOLA, encouraged by two pieces of good fortune following so rapidly on each other, appeared at Court with an air of victorious assurance which added greatly to his attraction. Knowing vaguely that the misfortunes with which he was threatened must be based on some sincere and devoted attachment, and influenced moreover by the natural vivacity of his character, he determined not to allow himself any serious passion, but by the right amount of inconstancy to prevent his heart from ever becoming too much involved and leading him into the snares which he was trying to avoid. He adopted that air of stylish affectation which does not give women an assurance of too much fidelity, though necessity and the topsy-turvydom of the age have compelled them to pretend not to notice it; otherwise the attentions that would be acceptable to them would be very few and far between. Scintilla noticed the change that was taking place in the Prince, and so far from being alarmed at it, since it was characteristic of the manners of her Court, on which she wanted



him to model himself, she found him, on the contrary, much more charming. He himself humoured her moods so skilfully as to lead her to hope that to her alone would fall the honour of educating him, whilst in his own heart he was determined not to confine himself entirely to her guidance.

One of the first people he saw was Almaïr, who approached him and said: 'I deserve at least some thanks for arranging things as I did last evening; for I imagine that you paid your debt with interest, and that, like a wise man, you made the most of such an admirably arranged party.'

'You may rest easy about that,' said the Prince. 'I am indeed indebted to you for my bliss. I was very happy, my dear Almaïr, and I think that I may flatter myself that I owe as much to Zobéide's affection as to the excellence of the opportunity. What charms! What passion! It would be impossible to paint you an accurate picture of the delights of that wonderful night.'

'I can well believe it,' replied Almaïr; 'one's first love affairs are always accompanied by that intoxication which gives them such a marvellous attraction. Your imagination will gradually grow accustomed to pictures of this kind, their impression will become less clear and you will find yourself obliged to have recourse to the specific which

I myself use to revive them: in a word, change will become necessary for you. Encouraged by the example and justified by the behaviour of women, you will come to regard the passions as matters of convenience. It is the fashion to do so in these days and, as a matter of fact, I am certain that you will soon conform to it. On the other hand, Zobéide is charming, and I advise you to keep to her so long as you amuse each other. You may even make her your principal mistress: which will not prevent you from devoting yourself to those minor and fleeting infidelities which are readily forgiven amongst persons who are wise in the ways of the world.'

'But no,' said the Prince, absently; 'I am very fond of Zobéide, and I cannot see that I can do better than to keep to her. After all,' he went on, 'I cannot believe that one has complete control over the action of one's heart; and if at any time my interest languished I should think myself obliged to put an end to the affair as decently as I could; but that is still a long way off.'

'Personally, I always foresee that moment,' said Almaïr. 'I look on pretty women as so much merchandise, to which anyone may aspire. I wanted Zobéide before you did, but I guessed your aspirations, and I gave her up to you, fully resolved to

reawaken mine as soon as your fancy for her had passed.'

'And Aménis,' said the Prince, 'what will you do with her?'

'I have never,' said Almaïr, 'had any very passionate affair with Aménis. We came together rather from expediency, we have remained together without any stipulations as to conduct, and I suppose we shall leave each other without any regrets. Besides, if it really did pain her, you might do worse than to undertake her cure: you would, I am sure, be very conscientious about it, and you could even congratulate yourself on the opportunity of doing so. Aménis is extremely charming, though your preoccupation with Zobéïde has perhaps prevented you from noticing it. She is quite as attractive as Zobéïde and has a much prettier and more polished wit; she has that frivolous and nimble Court outlook on life which is so fashionable nowadays: in a word, she is an excellent education for a young man, and when you are tired of Zobéïde I think you would really do well to take Aménis for a little while.'

'We shall see,' said the Prince. 'I find her very fascinating; she has just the look that I adore in women, one which is very encouraging to a man

of my age, and perhaps in time I will turn my attention to her.'

'You will always find her ready to receive it,' answered Almaïr, 'and I will never make the least difficulty about giving my rights up to you, merely because of my eagerness to succeed to yours!'

With which they separated and went off to swear eternal fidelity to the ladies whom they were already contemplating leaving.

The Prince, who was acquiring fresh experience daily and was becoming more and more expert in the insincerities of the Court, divided his life for some time so skilfully between the Fairy and Zobéide that each thought she was in sole possession of his heart; and profiting by this delusion of theirs he made many trysts with them, in which they lavished their most precious favours on him, and in which it was always easy for him to deceive them because the outward signs of his love were ardent enough to deceive any woman. At last he gradually found himself arriving at that jaded state of a man on whom love begins to pall, and who consequently finds his enthusiasm waning. He began to suffer from an astonishing feeling of emptiness, and was already looking about for a remedy for his languor, when Almaïr came to see

him one morning when he was still in his own apartments.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Almaïr. ‘What is the meaning of that air of far-away melancholy hanging over you? Are my prophecies on the point of coming true? Are you already in need of the remedy of whose efficacy I boasted to you?’

‘I do not know,’ said the Prince, ‘the reason of the alteration you see in me, but I am bored to death; the Court irritates me, and I cannot bear the daily parades. I go vainly from theatre to theatre, carrying my boredom with me as I go.’

‘I have brought you the very remedy,’ said Almaïr; ‘we have arranged a charming party in the country, and I actually came to ask you to join us; there will be plenty of pretty women, and not the shadow of a husband. We will spend the nights there and will enjoy ourselves thoroughly; the house is quite close to the town and beautifully situated, and you cannot possibly refuse, as I am counting on you.’

‘Excellent,’ interrupted the Prince, jumping up briskly. ‘Let us away, my dear Almaïr: you are a most competent doctor, and I place myself in your hands with full confidence.’

‘Not so fast,’ replied Almaïr. ‘I have come to

take you to dinner, after which we will call on Aménis, at whose house the party is to meet so that we should all start together.'

After dinner they went round to Aménis, where they found a large party of men and women waiting. The Prince's arrival was greeted in the most flattering manner. As Aménis knew him already, she paid him those little polite attentions which even from a pretty woman may mean more than they appear to do. He considered her with more attention than he had hitherto done, and was surprised that he had not so far done more justice to her charms. Her figure was perfect; her dull golden hair, which grew so prettily, was a marvellous frame to her face with its exquisitely delicate features; in her eyes there lurked a look of tenderness which raised the Prince's hopes to the highest pitch. She was dressed in a country toilette which revealed a part of her snow-white neck and shoulders. All her charms were infinitely enhanced by the air of breeding and the Court bearing, which she possessed in the highest degree, and to which she even added a fresh grace by the delicate turn of her wit. Her words were full of enthusiasm, and the eagerness with which for some time she had sought the conquest of Angola, added to her charms and brought her to that



delightful state of animation which is so extremely attractive in women, and often stands them in the stead of beauty.

After a few general remarks a move was made to start off. Almaïr, who was entrusted with the arrangements of the carriages, carried out his task so skilfully that all the carriages were literally full, and there was only one with two places left for Aménis and the Prince. After having complained of Almaïr's stupidity, for the sake of propriety, they stepped in, actually very pleased with this arrangement.

Angola, who had now learnt how to behave when alone with a lady, made the most of the opportunity afforded him for pressing his suit.

'I do not know, madam,' he said to Aménis, 'whether I ought really to be grateful to Almaïr for the delightful situation in which I find myself; the danger to which he is exposing me might become so great that I might even be justified in looking on it as the vengeance of an enemy.'

'I see no danger here for you to be frightened of,' said Aménis pertly, 'and besides, I assume that your own feelings would ensure you against any possible danger, and that your obligations to others would protect you in much more perilous situations.'

‘But in your presence everything else is forgotten,’ went on the Prince earnestly; ‘my heart tells me that only too clearly; and if it could only flatter itself with the faintest spark of hope it would be only too willing to bear fresh bonds.’

‘If certain indications could be believed,’ said Aménis, lowering her eyes, ‘the bonds could be made so light that they would never irk your heart.’

‘I would gladly run the risk,’ said the Prince; ‘but, madam, am I being too bold if I tell you that your kindness makes me hope my feelings are returned? And what would I not do to make myself worthy of such good fortune!’

‘It is perhaps easier for me to capture you,’ said Aménis, ‘than to keep you, for I am terribly afraid that Zobéide will cling to the rights the loss of which she will not bear so lightly.’

‘I only think of you,’ said the Prince; ‘the whole universe cannot distract me from my thoughts; and the hope of attracting you blinds me to all the troubles I might ever have to fear.’

## Chapter II

*An unheard-of affair, which can be passed over  
if desired.*

THEY were still talking in this strain when they arrived at the country house belonging to Aménis: it was near enough to the city for one not to feel completely exiled, and yet it was far enough to be away from its turmoil and tumult. It was delightfully situated, its garden was charming, and its rooms were well planned and comfortable. Into this happy spot the guests brought that air of liberty which the country inspires, and which has such a thorough understanding with love. Indeed, how many love affairs would never have succeeded but for parties of this kind! Virtue, which in cities is upheld by prejudices and bristles with decorum, fights against pleasure with all these phantoms and often routs it. But in the country its unnatural weapons are removed and everything is against it—liberty, the opportunity, the seclusion, the woodland glades; it succumbs, often leaving behind it nothing but regret for not having yielded sooner.

Some days were spent in this delightful place in the enjoyment of the most varied pleasures. There were charming suppers with the most carefully

chosen and delicate fare. The women were gay and kind: of course, they all had colds or coughs, as it is right for women of a certain condition to have in the country; and yet they sang divinely, earning hearty applause, which they received protesting all the time that their voices were gone and their throats swollen, and that they were singing abominably. The men also showed a talent for singing: they sang the latest songs, whose naughtiness was only lightly veiled and which were found to be *too* absurd . . . ! The ladies tittered, made themselves blush, lowered their eyes and pretended not to listen, though they actually never missed a single word.

Almaïr, whose keen eye the growing affection between Angola and Aménis had not escaped, was delighted to witness the success of his schemes, and did his utmost to encourage it by throwing them together in a way of which he knew the Prince would take advantage. They went for long walks together; and the Prince, finding himself alone with Aménis, played his part so well, that he wrung from her an admission of the inclination she felt towards him. He received this admission with ecstasy, and when she expressed her fears and doubts as to his sincerity, he tried to dissipate them by the extravagant protestations that were then

fashionable, and which meant less and less according as their fervour increased. But they satisfied Aménis, or at least they appeared to do so; in those days one did not investigate these things too closely.

All that these two lovers lacked now to prove their mutual love was a favourable opportunity. Angola was always ardently seeking one, and Aménis was by no means trying to avoid it. A still further delay was caused by a sudden caprice which took the whole party one afternoon. Every day a lackey was despatched to town to bring back the latest news and any new songs or books. One day he announced that they were playing *M . . .* at the Comédie Française. At the name of this play every one grew excited; and although they had all seen it several times already, it was un-animously agreed that they should go to it again. A messenger was sent to engage boxes, and the horses were harnessed to the carriages. The buzz of cheerful excitement that always accompanies impromptus of this kind ran through the party. The women cut their toilets short, and after protesting a thousand times that they were dressed like clowns, appeared clad in a mixture of town and country clothes, which was quite without studied elegance, and though less dazzling to the

senses, gave rise to a tender and more touching emotion; they got into their carriages and drove off.

When the party arrived at the doors of the theatre it was the object of much curiosity on the part of the brilliant assembly occupying the staircase and the foyer. They pretended to be there incognito, hiding their faces behind their fans and taking great care to be seen by every one. At last, after running the gauntlet of curious glances and ribaldry, they reached their boxes.

The theatre was packed with a brilliant audience. Although the play no longer had the charm of novelty, its continued popularity was sufficient proof of its real merit, and of the opinion in which the public held its illustrious author. The boxes were crowded with charming women, clad in their most sumptuous garments. Some of them had come to listen to the play and to admire its beauty, others to pretend to do so, professing to intelligence and wit, a type of woman much more unbearable than those who are frankly ignorant and do not try to overrate themselves: such women profess definite opinions about everything, and in criticizing a play they begin by saying that the actors were well dressed or that such and such an actress was dowdy, that her coiffure was too far back or her choice of jewelry in poor taste. Most



of the ladies, however, simply came to parade their charms in the half-light of the theatre, that soft distant glow of candle light so favourable to faded beauty, and which does but enhance the radiance of young loveliness.

The parterre, on the other hand, was full of men, amongst whom were very few who really appreciated the beauty of the play. Those who did, like sensible beings, did not make an exhibition of themselves to the public, and waited quietly in their places for their pleasure to begin with the tragedy; but those who are called men of fashion had quite a different idea of the way to behave. They took very little interest in the play, and many of them asked what they were playing, in the middle of the fifth act. Lounging brazenly in their places, they paraded their seductive charms, stared continually through their quizzing-glasses, smoothed their shirt frills, toyed with their bouquets, whistled the latest airs, and made suggestive signs to the actresses, who frequently did not even know them. In the end, after exhausting all the common phases of a coquetry which would not have surprised one in the boldest woman, they chose the most interesting situation or passage in the play during which to stroll across the theatre, looking at their watches and discomposing the actors, and left with an

abstracted and busy air, only to leap into their carriages and to go and show themselves at all the other theatres, where they behaved in the same indecent and idiotic way.

All these dazzling young men were still preening themselves when it was announced that the play was about to begin; and it says not a little for the extraordinary reputation of the piece that all the mincing and disorder and chatter ceased at once, and that they prepared to listen attentively to this admirable masterpiece.

Everything in the play bore witness to the profound genius and unique talents of the great master who wrote it: the plot was interesting, the situations delightful, the characters skilfully drawn, the poetry sonorous and emotional, and the sentiments expressed worthy of the greatest heroes. The perfection of all these details produced a marvellous effect. There was in particular a scene of reconciliation, a very popular theme with which all tragic authors had a mania for filling up their plays at that time, and which very few of them managed to bring in with any success. This one was, however, perfect in every respect, being well introduced, quite reasonable, and absorbing. It was the most striking stage effect that one could wish for, in which in her loving emotion a mother weeps over

the misfortunes of her son. The part of the mother, played by the most famous actress of the period, seemed to acquire added interest from the way in which she played it. This past-mistress of her art played the part with such admirable realism that she touched the very souls of the audience, brought tears to their eyes, and made them share in her sorrow and despair.

The play was frantically applauded, a just reward for the great genius of its illustrious author. He was himself in the theatre, witnessing the constant success of his play, like an affectionate father watching over the fate of a beloved child. This inimitable genius received with becoming modesty the marked enthusiasm of the public, though it was very far from repaying the debt which his century owed to him; and, indeed, was there anything he had undertaken in which he had not been equally successful? A profound philosopher, he had divested the ancient systems of philosophy of those obscurities and contradictions that made them more tedious than instructive. He had enriched our language with a new system which was a thousand times clearer, and had made philosophy, so to speak, tangible and brought it within the reach of every one. Whilst yet in her cradle his muse had sung of heroes and

battles, and in this work one found that note of energy, that swift and exalted poetry, which places man above himself, and which even the Homers and the Virgils of the world only acquire by endless labours.

Later he had turned his attention to the stage, and had lifted it from the listless state into which it had fallen at the death of two great masters who possessed in the highest degree the art of moving their audiences. Every subject became equally beautiful in his skilful hands. If he was depicting the savage pride of a sultan, the material, as it were, softened in his hands, and became susceptible of love and virtue. When he described the fickleness of a Princess brought up in the mists of error, violently swayed by the pathos of her circumstances, torn by remorse, and yet burning with a guilty passion which she could not extinguish, this part, played by an exquisite actress for whom it seemed to have been made, drew delicious tears from the audience and made them sympathize even with her faults.

If he was depicting the appalling crimes of some hero of antiquity, more unfortunate really than guilty, he interpreted the part with such felicity that the horror inspired by the hero's actions was tempered by that pity for faults which seem to be

ordained by Fate. He made the wretched man, victim of those rending emotions in which virtue vies with vice, inspire every one by his example with a horror of crime. He perished full of virtue, since there can be no crime without intention, and a man may remain virtuous even in fulfilling the most bitter destiny. The guilty man disappeared, leaving in the minds of the audience nothing but tender pity for his misfortunes.

This great man possessed every talent to much too high a degree to be secure from envy. A few inferior writers, discredited men without morals and suspected of nameless vices, were bitterly opposed to him; nothing, however, could have been so humiliating for him as to have gained their approval, as this might have given rise to a suspicion that they had something in common; so the hatred they showed for him, far from damaging his reputation, only succeeded in establishing it, bringing all thoughtful people over to his side and adding an ineffaceable lustre to the greatest genius of the century.

The tragedy was followed by the *O . . .*, a little fairy play in which the author, with a delightful simplicity, ably develops the various impulses of nature in an uninitiated heart, the gradual stages by which love is born, and the tendency of youth

to yield to its shy seductiveness. This part was played wonderfully well by a charming actress who knew how to please the public. Although she herself had long been initiated into the arts of love, she wore a simple and childlike look which deceived one in spite of oneself, and she feigned innocence to such perfection that one felt strongly tempted to put it to the test, in spite of the fact that she had already turned it to advantage long before. In the play she held a certain Prince by a ribbon leash, and he submitted quietly to his bonds, in order to lead her little by little to share them. The part of the Prince was played by an actor who was both handsome and accomplished. Unfortunately, he was fully aware of both these things. He was exceptionally good in comedy, especially in the roles of fop or lover, which in stage perspective must always be a little exaggerated to create the right impression. He succeeded all the better because the general opinion was that he was only being his real self without realizing it.

At the end of the play, Aménis and her party remained seated for some time to give the theatre time to empty itself. At last they appeared on the staircase: they were quizzed, scrutinized and stared at rudely by a crowd of vapid young men,



who obstructed the passages and criticized everything and everybody. They attributed adventures to this lady, expressed indecent longings for that one loud enough for her to hear them, and abused everything in general. No women met with their approval except those who were unfortunate enough to have bought it at their own expense. In fact, it might have appeared that their vocation was to fight and overthrow people's absurdities, were it not that they were a mass of absurdities themselves.

Aménis swept by this formidable tribunal, who sometimes had the sense to suppress their criticisms, with that air of self-possession which singles out those ladies of the Court who are above criticism, knowing, as she did, that they could only be impressed by an assurance even greater than their own. She was followed down the stairs by the others and, passing through all the confusion and turning a deaf ear to the strong language of the coachmen and lackeys who besieged the door, they reached their carriages and drove off.

Almaïr was still as nimble as ever in his efforts to assist the Prince in his passion for Aménis, and arranged the carriages so cleverly that apparently entirely by chance the Prince again found himself in the same coach as Aménis.

‘You see,’ said Almaïr to him, ‘how devotedly I forestall your desires, and pander to them: time and opportunity will show you how you can repay me, and I shall be curious to see if you can emulate my unselfishness. For the present, think only of yourself, and get it firmly established in your mind that to be alone in a carriage for two hours with a pretty woman is an occurrence which does not happen as often as we should like it to do; that opportunities of this sort must be seized with both hands; that in the circumstances a man of the world cannot in decency avoid making some sort of proposal, and that three-quarters of the women who have begun by crying out against his impudence end by putting up with it; so that no man of a certain position dares let the opportunity pass for fear of laying himself open to the accusation of being a boor. It has even been observed that the women who are loudest in their outcries against compliments of this sort are those who most seldom receive them, and whose appearance might serve as an excuse for the most extreme propriety.’

The Prince had no time to reply: all the others were already in their places, so he got into the carriage with Aménis, quite determined to profit by Almaïr’s counsel.

The conversation between Aménis and the Prince turned for some time on the beauty of the piece they had just seen, and on the various degrees of ridiculous behaviour that had been brought to their notice; but Angola, who had other more pressing matters to discuss, brought it skilfully round to the subject of love, and rapturously renewed the assurances of his passion.

‘I must confess,’ said Aménis, ‘if you go on much longer, I think I shall be good-natured enough to allow myself to be persuaded. I used to fancy that all your protestations were only the sort of things a man feels bound to say to a woman, and which help to keep the conversation on a light plane and usually have no more meaning, and should be taken no more seriously, than three-quarters of the things that are said in the world.’

‘Ah, madam!’ replied the Prince, ‘you must form a more accurate idea of the impressions you make: they are much too vivid to be so easily effaced, and the happiness for which you have allowed me to hope is much too valuable for me to be able to renounce it.’

With these words, he kissed her hands ecstatically: and this favour, which at any other time might have seemed a considerable one, became by the circumstances in which they were placed one

of those natural and simple things about which it is not worth cavilling.

‘What mortal could be happier than I, madam,’ said Angola, ‘if you deigned to share with me the emotions you have aroused and whose violence is becoming too much for me?’

At the same time he clasped her in his arms. She did not reply, and the Prince, fearing that her silence was due to some insulting doubt about himself, devised a means of convincing her of the truth of his complaints, without horrifying her by too imposing a display. Inwardly she surrendered to such an excellent argument; but, as nothing could make her waive the proprieties, she only suffered his attentions with the idea of restraining them before they went too far. She also had a certain amount of curiosity to know what he would do next. The curiosity of women in this connection is very strong and often carries them farther than they intend. The Prince became importunate, and would no longer listen to reason: besides, it is so difficult to reason with others when one is not convinced oneself.

‘Leave me alone, now,’ she said to Angola in a flustered voice. ‘You have convinced me of your affection, and you can give me further proofs of it on another occasion.’

‘No,’ said the Prince, now all on fire, ‘I can no longer delay giving you proofs of my love; the sincerity of my own passion persuades me that you share it, and assures me of your tenderness.’

‘You have some very peculiar notions,’ said Aménis; ‘and even if I were good-natured enough to fall in with them they would be just as unprofitable; for after all,’ she went on, yielding herself absently to his caresses, ‘certain things are so well known to be impossible that it is absurd even to suggest attempting them.’

‘Nothing is impossible to an ardour such as mine,’ said the Prince, making headway, ‘and the more singular the situation in which one finds oneself, the more delightful are, I think, the pleasures of that situation.’

At the same time he fell on his knees and took Aménis into his arms. Her doubts and her scepticism began to disappear, and she made little resistance to the Prince’s ardour. Soon in her agitation she began to return his caresses, a weakening of which the Prince took the very fullest advantage, content in the humility of his position to share the delight of the moment with Aménis in all consideration for her own feelings. So occupied were they with their caresses that they had no time for more than a few disconnected words in

which they conveyed to each other how much they valued their mutual love. There followed some of those happy moments of idleness which succeed and indeed crown the most tender caresses, and which are in fact their only harvest, though they are so short-lived that they do not deserve to be added to the number of their pleasures.

They must not be thought to have indulged in any such clear reasoning: for their ardour, so far from diminishing, plunged them into fresh confusion. Aménis found the Prince's arguments irresistible: she would indeed have had qualms about expressing any further doubt about them after the convincing manner in which he had set about dispelling her earlier ones. At last they reached home, she very pleased with the explanations he had given her, and he very satisfied that he had not found it impossible to convince her.

On reaching home they sat down to supper at a decent hour, that is to say, at midnight. The supper was extremely gay. Aménis, who had good reason to be pleased with herself, was charming. The Prince, who was far from being subdued by his efforts, was an excellent foil to her, and Almaïr concluded they had not wasted their time, and hoped as a result that his own designs on Zobéide would be successful.



Several more days were passed in this delightful place in all the amusements which deserve that description when they are indulged in with a certain moderation, but which might well merit a different name by the lengths to which they were carried. Aménis and the Prince found several opportunities of proving their mutual affection. In the midst of the most delightful enjoyments they would suddenly disappear in a way which every one notices and which wise persons never pretend to have seen, because of the need they themselves have of such connivance and the necessity for mutual indulgence in these matters. Almaïr, who had his own reasons for leaving, took advantage one day of a moment when the conversation turned on some new event which had been reported to them, and which was making a stir in the town.

‘Actually,’ he said, ‘we have been buried here too long: the retirement is beginning to weary me, one does absolutely nothing here. When we return to town we shall be looked on as people from another world: we shall know no one, we shall be dressed in a discarded fashion and we shall be obliged to put our wardrobes to the sword. Believe me, we ought to go.’

The suggestion was eagerly received without

anyone knowing why. At last, after spending several days in eating, in gambling until they were bored with it, in spending the nights in idleness, in protesting that they had never enjoyed themselves so much, that they got on so well together and that they must have the same party again soon, they returned to town just as eagerly as they had left it. They separated with all the appearance of bitter regret and, being utterly bored with each other really, ardently sought to distract themselves in other ways, which gave them no greater pleasure as they obtained them too easily to appreciate them very highly.

### Chapter III

*As incredible as the preceding one.*

THE PRINCE, on his return, hastened to pay his court to Scintilla, who scolded him gently for his absence. She expressed her doubts about his fidelity, knowing quite well the means that he would use to reassure her, and she was obliged to yield herself to the strength and energy of the expressions he employed for the purpose. He continued to live with her in that happy and indolent state of mind of a man who possesses something quite delightful, but whose love, no longer spurred by desire or difficulty, necessarily loses that quality of poignancy which is its chief charm. He seldom saw Zobéide, and he had the satisfaction of seeing that she was sensible enough to fly for consolation to Almaïr, from whom he soon learnt that he had reason to be proud of his achievements, for which she felt anything but scorn. He escaped from the Court now and then to have a dainty little supper with Aménis, when the important points they had considered in the carriage were reopened and could be discussed more minutely in accordance with the greater convenience of the time and place. Aménis was very charming, and possessed to a very high degree those useful qualities which, far

more than beauty, keep a man enthralled and give him no time to plot infidelities. She always had pleasant company at her house, convinced that two lovers do not always suffice for one another, and that there must be idle moments even in the most ardent love affairs, when the presence of other carefully chosen people can but revive desire, by the very necessity under which one is of restraining oneself before them. She kept the Prince, as it were, in play by her skilful treatment of him, and delayed, at any rate, his tendency to stray.

Nevertheless, Scintilla still occupied the principal place in his heart: whether it was the glamour of such a flattering conquest, or whether that she was actually more charming, the Prince found greater pleasure in being with her, and left her with more regret than any of the others.

One day when, taking advantage of the extreme liberty she allowed him, he had entered her apartments whilst she was at a Council meeting, he amused himself by examining a quantity of jewelry and rare pictures which decorated her study; on the mantelpiece he found a box encrusted with diamonds. He opened it with a strange thrill: it contained a miniature. Heavens! into what a state the sight of that portrait threw him: it was that of a young girl, apparently about

eighteen years old. No words can even feebly describe the power of her charm: perfect regularity of feature, touching beauty and a simple grace shining from her eyes, a modest and reserved demeanour, made her face and her whole person weapons too dangerous to be capable of resistance. The artist had arranged her simple drapery to show the charm of her graceful figure, and the dazzling whiteness of her beautifully moulded hands and arms.

The Prince, thrilled to ecstasy by this unexpected vision, remained motionless for some moments, staring hungrily at the painting and taking long draughts of the subtle poison that found its way straight to his heart. The emotions he experienced were quite different from, and far superior to, any he had ever felt before. Indeed, the attachments he had hitherto made at Court were no more, so to speak, than what good manners demanded, and he had fallen into them impelled more by the force of opportunity and of the advances that had been made to him than by any inclination that he had felt himself. He had been the first to mistake the nature of his feelings, and had taken for love what was really only the ardour of youth eagerly seeking after pleasure. His feelings at the sight of this portrait were of an entirely

different nature: it was an unselfish love into which no thought or any hope of possession entered, and, what is still more difficult to believe, it was accompanied by a feeling of great respect.

The Queen surprised him whilst he was thus absorbed.

‘You are extremely inquisitive,’ she said, approaching him; ‘take care that your curiosity does not cost you dear. Perhaps you have already surrendered to these dangerous attractions; let me warn you that, if you do so, you will incur my displeasure in more ways than one, and that, apart from any rights which I myself may have over your heart and which I think are only my due, I have the strongest reasons in the world for not wishing you to turn your attention to someone whose destiny has a malignant connection with your own.’

With this she took the portrait from the Prince, who gave it up with an affectation of indifference which entirely deceived her.

Well versed in the art of hiding his emotions, he carefully disguised the feelings which might have offended her, and contented himself with asking, in the coldest voice he could assume, the name of the original of the portrait.

‘It is the portrait of Luzéide, Princess of Gol-



conda,' replied Scintilla. 'Her Royal father had resolved to send her to my Court to entrust the care of her education to me. But he is frightened of certain prophecies that have been made to him concerning the fate of his daughter, and being advised that all her misfortunes would be caused by love, he brings her up in solitude and away from any intercourse with men. He has implored me to receive her at my Court that she may acquire that polish which cannot be acquired in foreign countries; moreover he is persuaded, and rightly so, that my power should be able to shield her from the misfortunes that threaten her; and although I cannot stand in the way of the decrees of Fate, I should already have yielded to his entreaties, were it not that I seemed to see between her destiny and yours a certain connection which frightened me and made me fear that in throwing you together a fatal sympathy would spring up between you and justify my alarms.'

'How can you possibly have such misgivings?' said the Prince, assuming an air of great tenderness. 'Will you never be convinced for our mutual happiness that a mortal who is enamoured of you and is fortunate enough to have his love returned, must necessarily be insensible to any other charms, however seductive they may be?'

He accompanied these flattering words with caresses which did not yet require such an effort on his part as not to have all the charm of sincerity. The Queen, deceived by these tokens of an affection which she returned with all her own, received them with such loving eagerness that he felt obliged to redouble them, in case she thought him not sufficiently demonstrative. In this way they spent several of those delightful moments of which only true lovers are really worthy, as they alone can really appreciate them.

The Prince retired to his own apartments as soon as he could get away, and spent the whole night pondering over the charms of the incomparable Luzéide. He experienced a violent revulsion of feeling, and began to realize the difference between the love he now felt and that fleeting lure that had heretofore delivered him so swiftly to all the women who had come within his reach.

‘How mistaken I have been!’ he cried fervently. ‘I used to think I was in love: can I ever have used that divine word to describe those turbulent desires born of a whimsey, and maintained only by the ardour of my temperament? How different are my present feelings! I have seen women and I have obtained their most precious gifts, which they have bestowed on me, doubtless, for the same

reason that made me pursue them. Have I ever for a moment desired to possess their hearts? Intoxicated with pleasure, I have never sought anything more; therein I am now convinced lies the fatal source of the strange discontent which clouded over those years of my youth, in which I was more occupied with my intrigues. But now I want to possess some one's heart: that alone can make me happy, and henceforth I feel that only can satisfy my yearnings.'

He was still buried in his reveries when Almaïr came to see him next morning. Almaïr was amazed at his troubled and preoccupied air.

'What is the matter with you?' he cried; 'why are you so gloomy? Really, I cannot understand it at all, your appearance bewilders me so much that I can hardly recognize you.'

'Ah, my dear Almaïr!' said the Prince; words failed him, and he sank still deeper into his depression.

'Good heavens!' said Almaïr; 'I cannot bear to hear you sigh like that; you must tell me everything; it really seems serious, and I tell you frankly that I am deeply concerned at the sore distress in which I find you. I cannot imagine that any of the ladies of the Court has been squeamish enough to reduce you to laying formal siege to her heart and

to make you yearn for the favours which she probably offers willingly to those who seek them least; nor do I believe that at your age anything else can be serious enough to plunge you into such overwhelming sorrow. However, whatever the reason, I think I deserve your confidence, and in the name of our friendship I insist on it.'

'Well then,' said the Prince, 'you shall hear my troubles and judge for yourself of the unfortunate situation in which I am placed.'

He went on to tell him of his last conversation with the Queen, of the sight of Luzéide's portrait and of the strange effect that it had made on his heart. His recital was accompanied by the most real and passionate signs of emotion. He spoke from his heart and expressed himself with such fire that Almaïr was amazed at the extraordinary way in which he was affected. He had never known him show such ardour for any of the women to whom he had been attracted. When he answered him, his voice was very serious.

'Indeed,' he said, 'you are in worse case than you realize. I should never have suspected you of being a man to indulge in fantasies. I imagined that my lessons, the world and your own experience, would have established your outlook on women, and would have taught you that nothing

is so pitiable as the role of romantic hero. I had great hopes for you: you were visibly becoming a man of fashion. I had watched with pleasure your education at the hands of the two ladies of the Court who were best fitted for the education of a young man. I was relying on your not stopping there, and hoped that you would find others to bring you to perfection. You have destroyed my handiwork in a moment and, by proclaiming a constancy as fantastic as your passion, you will become the talk of the Court, and you will be mercilessly chaffed for such ridiculous behaviour.'

'I feel the justice of your arguments,' said Angola; 'and I bitterly regret that I have yielded to a kind of folly of which I have been the most implacable enemy, but I am at the mercy of my instincts; and if you had for a moment set eyes on the portrait of the charming Princess of Golconda, you would cease to oppose me so bitterly.'

'Then I should cease to be your friend,' said Almaïr emphatically. 'There is no reason why you should not find Luzéide charming, but you must temper your inclinations with reason and to the circumstances. You say the Queen is bringing her here: try to amuse yourself until she comes, and on her arrival give rein to your feelings. When she has breathed the atmosphere of the Court she will

certainly adopt its customs, and perhaps she will be just as eager to enthrall you as you are to be enthralled. If you should meet with an unexpected resistance, we must devise some efficacious means of eradicating this heresy and bringing her to her senses; but it is ridiculous for you to pine away beforehand, all because of a painter's imagination. Another two nights of torment like the last and you will really not be fit to be seen. But let us cheer up and talk of something more amusing. A few days ago a young woman named Clénire arrived in town: she is married to an old officer who, after spending his youth in squandering his wealth in the Army, imagined that gave him a right to a reward. His demands were treated as a bad joke, and were met in the same spirit. At last, after uselessly haunting ministerial antechambers for a long time, he grew tired of such a vain pursuit, and shrewdly decided to marry Clénire and to send her to plead for him. At the sight of such a charming person all the petty officials (posterity will never credit this) suddenly became polite and anxious to help, and she managed to penetrate right into the ministerial offices. At the sight of her the ministers put away their spectacles and reading-glasses and letters of recommendation; their brows cleared; they



listened to her whilst they gazed at her, answered her without reference to any papers, and on the spur of the moment; so, to make a long story short, she got a governorship for him, and left without being shown the door.

‘The Queen sent for her and was so charmed by her appearance that she kept her and gave her a position in the Palace. The husband was sent to his governorship on the borders of China, and Clénire remained at Court. She is quite adorable and extremely charming. She will soon need a determined man to undertake to mould her and to give her tone: the opportunity is really made for you. The affection of a man of your position will give her a certain cachet and will put her on the way to becoming a person of importance. She will owe you her gratitude, and she seems to me to be admirably suited to while away the time until Luzéide’s arrival.’

‘My heart is not sufficiently free,’ sighed the Prince, ‘to enable me to undertake such a charge, and I think that you had much better take my place.’

‘Let us go to Court,’ said Almaïr. ‘I hope that when you see her your resolutions will melt away.’

## Chapter IV

*Which will not be understood by every one.*

THEY arrived in time for the Queen's dinner, the Prince wearing a gloomy and absent look which he tried in vain to cast off. The Fairy looked at him thoughtfully, and the fear he felt of rousing her suspicions drove him to make another violent effort to disguise his sufferings. He saw Clénire, and in spite of his predictions he found her charming. Hers was a beauty without artificiality: adorned with Nature's own gifts, she ignored the aids supplied by Art, which can only imitate them very roughly. She was hardly conscious of her own beauty, and although there was no lack of people who were prepared to tell her of it, she had not yet acquired that conceited air that follows so soon on that knowledge, and which is unattractive enough to take away all desire of conquest. In fact, she was quite adorable, and had already caused much havoc and infidelity at Court; the Prince, however, paid her but little attention just then; and as soon as he could with decency retire, he went away to be alone with his anxious thoughts.

He wandered aimlessly about the Palace until he came to the door of the Queen's library. He entered, and was surprised at its beauty. He

reproached himself for not having had the curiosity to visit it before. His eyes first fell on a quantity of those large books which are necessary to fill the lower shelves of a library. They come into the same category as the foundations of a building, which are generally buried beneath the ground, and only serve to support the comfortable rooms above. The dust with which they were covered was a sufficient indication of their character. He then cast his eyes over the rows of books on law and custom, in which imposture plays so large a part and which are optimistically labelled 'Justice.' He saw all the old romances, that chaos of turgid sentimentality in which love is made by carefully defined steps like a course of theology, and in which the lover and his mistress carry on endless and ridiculous conversations, only granting and receiving favours geometrically and according to a prearranged time-table. He was careful not to touch any of these.

He then passed on to the poets, amongst whom he found a few brilliant geniuses who had lifted the century to the highest pinnacle of glory. The number of these was very small. They were lost amongst an infinity of Parnassian insects, that strange race that thinks it has reached immortality on the strength of a few pastoral poems and

a few insipid and mawkish ballads, the disgusting fruit of a sterile imagination, whose only appeal had been to the undiscerning ear of the publisher who had been stupid enough to ruin himself by printing them. He admired the beauties of the first and carefully avoided any temptation to read the others.

He then came to the authors of his own time. Here the field was vast and choice extremely difficult: the dross imitated the gold so closely that it could deceive even the most far-seeing and cautious. First of all he skimmed rapidly over a crowd of hack writers, authors of a mass of dull novels, badly constructed and devoid of any interest. One of the writers in particular turned out books and distributed them like newspapers (and they were treated in much the same way) without any imagination, power of description or grammar; his dry and meagre style bore witness to the bloodless sterility of its author. He had tried to establish a reputation by publishing a book whose title had deceived the public; he had at one time been popular because of the irreligious note that ran through his books, which amused the very young; he attacked the priesthood hammer and tongs, without either intelligence or fastidiousness; if there had been anything with which really to

reproach it he had not had the intelligence to discover it and to tell it with that delicacy which excuses a good jest, and which never relies on coarseness or invective. But persons of good taste were soon undeceived, and despised this vile rhapsody of stories against the priests, which could never be popular save in the country where the author had sought refuge and where there reigned unbridled licence and a damnable insolence which were adorned with the name of 'Liberty'. It was soon revealed that all the best parts of the book had been taken word for word from a celebrated author of the previous century, to whom the language of the country owed a great debt, and who, in his other works, had propounded a train of thought which it was too dangerous to analyse.

Next to these were some of the works of an author who was not without imagination. He created interesting situations which he could not develop. His language was slovenly, he expressed himself crudely and his comments were trivial. In vain did he claim that his breeding exempted him from the necessity of a polished style: the obscurity into which he had fallen should have shown him clearly that nothing will excuse an author for neglecting to please his public.

Angola was delighted to see the works of

another very talented author on the shelves. This author was even reproached with putting too much into his works, as it were, or at least with making the mind express itself in an unknown language. His style, which at first glance seemed extremely simple, on further reflection appeared to be abominably affected. He had conceived the most extraordinary knack of being stilted and obscure whilst using the clearest and most ordinary phrases; affecting, moreover, to represent coarse and trivial ideas which could only be of the most moderate interest, in order to appear original. For all that, he was a very talented man, to whom the theatre owed a great debt.

There were also some of the works of an author whose character was entirely foreign to the productions of his pen. He was a man of great intelligence; his style was noble, elegant and polished. The harmonious turn of his phrases was pleasant to the ear; and, although his works were not all equally good, they were generally admired. He was accused of having a gloomy imagination which took pleasure in leading his readers into the most depressing situations: one was horror-stricken and yet one went on reading, eagerly looking forward to the triumph of his hero, in whom he had found the secret of interesting one.



Near by, as a corrective to this, the Prince had the good fortune to find the delightful works of the foremost author of the century in this style. This man had at the most impressionable age learnt the vicissitudes of the human heart, and had written a book in which its most secret impulses were revealed. A noble, clear, and simple style, embellished with incomparable grace, ran through all his writings; he depicted the customs of the century with an entirely original spontaneity. He had also amused himself by writing a few sketches of a more striking nature; he described love and its most delicate situations with a truth of detail which led one to believe that he was only speaking from his own experience. Respected by men for the purity of his morals and the beauty of his genius, how should he be regarded by women, and what woman is there who would not wish to receive lessons in love from a man who knew so well how to describe its charms? His works, which bore the stamp of real genius, were altogether independent of the vicissitudes of fashion and the vagaries of a fickle public.

Not far away, a few shelves lower down, Angola found the writings of a man to whom one can deny neither talent nor intelligence. He had made his first appearance with two works, of which one

succeeded by its own worth and the other, in spite of a certain shallowness, had taken the fancy of the public, although in it the public was treated in a very high-handed manner, and the author seemed to take little enough trouble to secure its support. It would have been better if he had stopped there and had not, in order to deserve the title which was conferred on him, undertaken to piece together an old story which has already been written several times and is of very little interest nowadays owing to lapse of time, and in any case is only a rehash of a hundred old anecdotes which every one knows! Moreover, his too florid style is not suited to the description of events which are too serious to be susceptible of humour and levity.

The Prince, his mind full of all these different fancies, was on the point of leaving, when he found beneath his feet a book which seemed to have been purposely spurned by every one who came into the room. He picked it up, and through all the dirt with which it was covered he recognized the works of a man whose position, which seemed to be at war with his character, seemed only to increase its rancour. This man, or rather this Fury, prostituting his intelligence and writing with neither taste nor decency, stuck like a leech

to all the most celebrated authors. Disliking anything of any merit, the black serpents of jealousy were always tearing at his vitals. He expressed his opinion on everything that was written, substituting for fair and careful criticism the most violent diatribe and a facetious coarseness in the worst possible taste. Everything in this book pointed to the sordidity of its author's mind: it was full of false statements, which he upheld with an academic obstinacy, a trite and hackneyed sophistry, despised by all and feared by none. He was regarded as a snarling dog, and received about the same amount of appreciation. Besides, he was a man without any moral sense, addicted to the most abominable debauchery. His only advantage was that his vices were of such a nature that they could not be mentioned. He perished as he had lived: his end was that of a man without morals or principles, and he took to the grave neither the esteem of honest men nor the regrets of libertines.

The Prince had hardly read a few pages of this abominable book when, realizing the infamous character of the author, he cast it far from him in a rage and returned it to its former fate, which was to be spurned by the feet of every one entering that room.

## Chapter V

*And high time, too!*

THE PRINCE left the library and wandered out into the gardens to be alone with his thoughts. He saw clearly that the slightest difference in his mood would be noticed by the Queen, and that she would perhaps even guess the cause of his anxiety. He shuddered to think of the result which any such conjectures on her part might have, and determined so to control himself as to give no clue to his real feelings. The natural effervescence of youth which prevented him from dwelling too long on distressing things did more for him, perhaps, than all his resolutions. He returned to the Court and assumed, as far as he was able, that unhampered and affected air which it had been so easy for him to acquire, which three women out of four are always crying out against and condemning, but which, nevertheless, always succeeds in turning their heads. Scintilla found him adorable, and Aménis was delighted at being associated with him. She simpered at him, kept drawing him aside to ask him in an undertone how he was feeling, and lost no opportunity of talking to him in a way that suggested familiarity. In fact, she took as much trouble to advertise her intrigue with

him as another woman might have taken to conceal it, though the world is never slow to imagine things whenever there is any mischief to be made.

He played his part so naturally that the Queen entirely forgot her misgivings about the portrait. He even forced himself to look at it several times without any apparent emotion; besides, his life with her was of such a nature as to calm all her fears, and his heart was not yet so enthralled as to make this part a very difficult one to play. One day, in the course of one of those intimate talks that follow the most tender caresses, and indeed often cause their renewal, the Fairy said:

‘The King of Golconda is again urging me to let him send his daughter, the Princess Luzéide, to my Court, and I do not see how I can refuse any longer. I think I shall be obliged to consent; besides, I was present at her birth, and I take a tender interest in everything that concerns her; so I am going to fix the day of her departure, and you will soon see her here.’

It was with difficulty that the Prince disguised his joy at this announcement, but he had sufficient control over himself to answer indifferently and even to go so far as to change the conversation. The Queen was convinced by this behaviour that

she could agree to the King of Golconda's request without running any risk, and shortly afterwards she announced to her Court the arrival of the Princess.

Much had been heard of her extreme beauty; so this news caused a stir of excitement, particularly amongst the Court dandies, who all secretly determined to try the effect of their attractions on such a promising subject.

A few days later her arrival was heralded by an army of servants, the mob of useless people who precede or follow great nobles, and are of no earthly use to them, are often not even known to them, and only succeed in irritating every one wherever they go and in working post-horses to death.

The Queen received the Princess with every mark of honour and the greatest affection, and was charmed by her appearance. She was, it is true, very unfashionably attired: her hair was dressed clumsily, and her whole appearance was spoilt by that air of innocence which gives rise to so much derision at Court, because no one there is lucky enough to possess it. All this was carefully noted by the young exquisites of the Court, but the men forgave her all for her beauty; and though the women did not think it advisable to



interfere, their thoughts were easy to read and their silence spoke for them.

The Prince was amongst the first to show his eagerness to study her. He offered her his hand to assist her from her coach, and he had plenty of time whilst passing through the ante-rooms to gaze on her perilous beauty to his heart's content, thus confirming the impression that her portrait had made on his heart. His demeanour as he led her along was so thoughtful and embarrassed that it could not have failed to attract Scintilla's attention, had she not been fully occupied in receiving the Princess.

The Fairy, seeing how much her clumsy foreign clothes detracted from Luzéide's beauty, immediately summoned hairdressers and dressmakers, and commanded them to array her in the latest fashion. She was taken to the fashionable shops to choose lace and all kinds of elegant little trimmings. She then went to the jeweller's and purchased aigrettes, precious stones, ear-rings and ropes and necklaces of diamonds. She began by disliking everything, ended by accepting everything that was praised to her as being the most beautiful, remained for three hours in the shop, changed her mind a hundred times about the settings of the jewels, asked the merchant a thousand

questions about the diamonds which he sold to the Court ladies, and inquired as an afterthought the price of those she had chosen, without paying any attention to his answer, a fact of which the merchant did not fail to take advantage to rob her with impunity, though with the greatest humility and respect.

All this shopping amused the Queen extremely, for quite apart from the claims that trinkets always have on the feminine heart, things were different in those days from now, and monarchs in the midst of the pleasures of their Courts experienced moments when they became tired of their own greatness and were only too delighted to descend to the amusements of ordinary people.

Luzéide, clad in magnificent clothes in which taste was even more evident than splendour, was like a brilliant star paling all the others. Her own hair was dressed with flowers and diamonds artistically woven into it, the tiniest bonnet being perched on the top of a chignon worn very high, as was then the fashion; her dress was of the very latest material, white, gridelin and gold, decorated with a pattern of pagodas and Chinese figures; her polonaise and other trimmings were of chenille and cockchafer's wings, her corset was adorned with precious stones, and her sleeves consisted

of three layers of the most exquisite English lace. The Court ladies tried very hard to find fault with her, but their endeavours did not meet with much success: one of them said she had too little colour, another found that her hair was too far back; one said that the pattern of her dress was too elaborate and that the trimmings were badly chosen, another that her diamonds were badly set, had no sparkle, were not of good water and looked like paste; others said that she looked like a foreigner, and knew neither how to place her patches nor how to hold her fan, and that there was something awkward and artificial about her appearance.

But the verdict of the men, who pay little attention to a lady's clothes and do not waste time in criticizing them, except when the lady herself does not interest them, was a very different one. Amazed at seeing so many perfections in one person, their praise bore a stamp of sincerity which should have been all the more flattering to her because they did not err on the side of over-indulgence in this quality. She won the approbation of them all without employing, in order to do so, any of those unseemly and repellent manœuvres which at best only appeal to the senses and have no effect at all on the heart.

They next turned their attention to her mental qualities, and beneath her simple language, of the sort so disapproved of at Court, they discerned a solidity and accuracy of thought which was astounding in a country where a warped affectation of diction and a few fantastic expressions as a rule took the place of reason and precision; moreover, she possessed a great fund of sweetness of character and a very high idea of the Court to which she was come, and that fact seemed to indicate that she would adopt its customs only too soon.

The Prince, being able to see her whenever he chose, had ample time to study all her qualities, and found his love increasing hourly. He carefully sought opportunities of declaring it to her, but, overcome by a shyness which he could not master, he let them all go by without taking any advantage of them.

He was condemned to this unpleasant condition of restraint for some considerable time: the difficulties of the situation increased his passion, but the coldness and indifference with which the Princess received all the usual attentions with which he pursued her, and her very skill at avoiding them, made him despair of ever making any headway, and he abandoned himself to his reveries, seeking out the most remote places in

which to commune in solitude with his passion. One day Almaïr interrupted him whilst he was thus occupied.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘behold at last the conqueror become a slave himself! And it is the simple charms of a child, stripped of all the science in which real charm lies, that have worked this miracle. Really I do not understand you. Do you realize that you are falling into the most pitiable state to which a man of gallantry can be reduced? And where will it lead you to? For, after all, you must declare yourself sooner or later, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of this formidable person. The most sensible thing to do, in my opinion, is to get out of it as quickly as possible. After all, I do not suppose you will get your eyes scratched out; besides, when it is obviously quite impossible to succeed, a man of the world withdraws discreetly and does not run the risk of becoming the trophy of a capricious woman, who often only refuses his advances to accept those of some one of far less importance than himself.’

‘How easy it is for you to offer me advice,’ said the Prince, ‘and how I wish it were as easy for me to follow it! I admit the truth of your arguments, but my heart is not free enough for me to be able to act upon them. For I am not dealing now with

one of those sudden attractions which have successively enthralled me with various ladies of the Court. I did not know what love was, and my lack of experience made me use the word to describe those tumultuous emotions which derive their origin from uncontrolled passion; how well do I realize my mistake now! The adorable charms to which I have succumbed excite quite a different kind of rapture in my heart: it is Luzéide's love for which I crave, and my passion is not marred by any of the desires that distinguish the passions of youth, which always leave a feeling of emptiness in the heart and are not really in the least flattering to the lady who is the object of them.'

'You are talking like a romantic novel,' interrupted Almaïr, 'which does not, however, in the least prevent your objective from being the same; you may even be certain that any woman who might pretend to take you at your word would in her heart be extremely annoyed if she thought that you really meant it seriously; and even admitting your theories, it is quite evident that, except possibly afterwards to ease things off, nothing is so fruitless as to wear one's self out with sighs and tenderness with no object in view. If you wish me to tell you the conclusions to which I myself have come (for I risk nothing with a man possessed of as



little conceit as you are), unless I am much mistaken, the Princess is far from being unresponsive to you. I am under the impression that I have surprised some of the glances she has given you on the sly, which seemed to be anything but indifferent, and I am convinced that with proper care you can triumph over her modesty and put your affairs into decent order again. Take my advice, and do not give her time to become prejudiced, perhaps in favour of some one else: you would regret too late the time lost in making reflections which are always useless in such circumstances.

‘But I see the Queen with all her Court coming in this direction; I will not speak to you of Clénire any more, her time has not come; and yet, either I am a false prophet or you will pay your homage to her charms too some day. At present your heart is set on Luzéide, and I advise you to press your suit at once, and not to let such a favourable opportunity pass without finding out how you stand.’

## Chapter VI

*A seized opportunity and an unexpected obstacle.*

By this time they had come up to the Queen and her Court.

‘What,’ said Scintilla, ‘is the meaning of this serious conversation in which you are engaged? I am most curious about it: I do not imagine you were talking about the interests of my Kingdom, and I can think of nothing else that could make you look so solemn.’

‘We were having a serious discussion about love, madam,’ said Almaïr, ‘and about all the worries to which one is exposed in yielding to it, and we have come to the conclusion, the Prince and I, that it is only by avoiding it, or by treating it flippantly, that one can escape its tyranny.’

‘That conclusion,’ said the Queen, ‘does not in the least surprise me so far as you yourself are concerned, but can I be sure that the Prince quite agrees with you? I do not believe that he even knows the meaning of the word “love”, nor do I think that he has very much desire to learn.’

As she spoke she cast a tender glance at the Prince, in which she seemed to seek reassurance on the point which she professed to doubt. The Prince, who was by this time occupied with

Luzéide, paid little heed to her advances, and choosing a favourable moment said diffidently:

‘This conversation does not seem to interest you very much; doubtless love means too little to you for you to condescend to give any opinion about it?’

‘I know nothing at all about it,’ said Luzéide, blushing and hastily lowering her eyes; ‘the colours in which it has been painted to me have not given me a very favourable impression of it. It is generally surrounded by so many unpleasant circumstances that it seems to me to be senseless to expose oneself to it.’

‘How lucky one would be to be able to undeceive you,’ went on the Prince in a warmer and more confidential voice, ‘and how different are the emotions which you yourself inspire! I know of a love whose sincerity and ardour would please you if only your heart were not proof against any such sentiment.’

‘At any rate, that is how I would have it be,’ replied Luzéide earnestly, ‘and I shall do my utmost to keep my opinions so that I may shield myself against the treachery to which one is subjected at the hands of those who profess the greatest attachment to us.’

The Queen, who was standing by them, prevented the Prince from answering, and left him

quite crushed by the attitude adopted by Luzéide. He determined, however, to make her change it, and hoped that in the course of their walk some opportunity would arise for renewing the conversation which interested him so much.

The Court dispersed into the various paths, and the Prince timed himself so well, that after wandering about aimlessly for some time, he came upon Luzéide as she stood in a bower looking at a beautifully modelled group of statuary; it represented Apollo and Daphne. Their arrangement was perfect, and the god seemed to be urged on by the love shining from his face. The nymph's eyes were full of fear, but some strange force seemed to slacken the speed of her flight: her hands were raised to heaven in a gesture of appeal for help which she would perhaps be glad later not to have had answered. Cupid, indignant at her stubbornness, was looking threateningly at her and seemed to want to oppose her intention. The Princess was examining this group carefully when Angola came upon her.

'Are you seeking fresh examples of inhumanity,' he said to her, 'in order to confirm yourself in the opinion which you expressed a little while ago?'

'My opinions are not dependent on things of this sort,' answered Luzéide, 'nor do I think that

they are of sufficient interest for you to be so anxious about them.'

'The great interest I take in everything about you is as real as is my unhappiness,' replied Angola. 'I know the fate I am preparing for myself, but my love is too great for me to care: I am only too well aware of the coldness of your feelings towards me, but I cannot stop myself.'

'Let me confess my crime, for you are the cause of it,' he pursued, falling on his knees. 'I can brave your anger, but nothing can make me renounce the sentiments on which henceforward the whole happiness of my life will depend.'

His attitude was a piteous one, tears were rolling not ungracefully down his cheeks, his words came straight from his heart, and he spoke with a sincerity which could not fail to make an impression upon a heart which was already touched with an affectionate sympathy for him.

'Rise, sir,' said Luzéide in a soft voice, 'and both for your peace of mind and for my own have done with talking of things to which I must not listen.'

'Very well,' said the Prince, 'complete the work you have begun for my destruction; I see it only too well, a bitter hatred is to be the only reward of my love, for your heart is too cold to be moved to pity at my plight!'

‘Rise, sir,’ repeated Luzéide, now intensely moved. ‘I do not hate you, but I hope that I shall always adhere to my sensible opinions.’

‘Only permit me,’ said the Prince, obeying, ‘to talk to you of the tenderness of my feelings for you and to hope that one day your own will reciprocate them.’

‘I ought not to allow you to,’ said the Princess, looking timidly at him, ‘but one does not always remember the things which one should fear most; it is only one more thing with which I am quite willing to have to reproach myself, but it is only by behaving in the most discreet manner possible that you can prevent me from repenting of my compliance.’

At this moment the Queen and her Court reappeared on the scene and interrupted the lovers, compelling the Prince to conceal the happiness that he felt.

‘I have just received news,’ said the Fairy, ‘that I shall soon receive a visit from the Djinn Makis, a great lord who is travelling to broaden his views, and is coming to my Court to acquire manners, which I am afraid he will find some difficulty in doing. He is related to the Fairy Malison, and though the difference in our characters has always proved a bar to any friendship between us,



etiquette, which nothing can permit us to ignore in the position we occupy, demands that I should extend to him a welcome worthy of his birth and rank.'

Those courtiers who had travelled and had seen the Djinn at the Court of the Fairy Malison did not paint a very glowing portrait of him, and those who did not know him, charmed with the idea of any new kind of oddity, awaited his arrival with impatience.

On the following day the arrival of the Djinn was announced to the Queen at her toilet. She had had apartments prepared for him in the Palace, and bade some of the gentlemen of the Court conduct him to them. Most of the courtiers arrived there before him to enjoy the sight. He alighted from his carriage with a kind of secretary, who was reading to him *The Mercury of Enigmas* to amuse him. His travelling clothes were not prepossessing, and that fact, added to the repulsiveness of his person, did not make a very great impression in his favour. He looked rather like one of those English merchants who travel in France and take the title of *Lord* on leaving the boat at Calais. He passed through the crowd of courtiers, acknowledging their salutes with a haughty though awkward and embarrassed air, and entered the

apartments reserved for him, to try to repair the ravages suffered by his charms during his journey.

The younger gentlemen of the Court amused themselves for some time in criticizing his carriages, which were extremely odd and in very bad taste. They were old-fashioned gilded chariots with huge shields and coats of arms blazoned in sixteen quarterings sufficiently complicated to tire the patience of the most enthusiastic genealogist. These chariots were lined with Utrecht velvet; the harness was trimmed with the same material, and the ungainly Flemish horses were quite unworthy of either ribbon or cockade, and would have disgraced the most poverty-stricken livery stable. The coachmen, postilions and lackeys were all small, old and of poor appearance, clad in garish and ill-fitting liveries. In fact, the whole turnout bore the same stamp of provincialism and absurdity which marked the appearance of its owner at first sight.

After a short interval, the Djinn sent to crave audience with the Queen, and appeared at Court with that air of haughtiness which becomes still more unbearable when it is unaccompanied by a certain ease of manner. He made the Queen a flowery and meaningless speech, to which she

replied with her usual graciousness. He stared a good deal at Luzéide, praised her openly and without any regard for her feelings, became inflamed with desire for her, and behaved in such a way that within two hours the whole Court knew all about it.

The Prince heard about this, as every one else did, and though actually he regarded him as a contemptible rival, he could not avoid a certain uneasiness which seemed to augur misfortune for him. The Djinn spent some days in visiting all the sights of the capital, so that for a time Luzéide was delivered from his persecutions. But when he had satisfied his curiosity, he returned to the Court, and seizing the first opportunity that arose, he made the Princess a blunt and awkward declaration. He boasted to her of the charms of his person, of his rank, of his wealth, and above all of his power, and concluded by saying that he was prepared to abase himself to her mortal level and had chosen for her the honour of his hand in marriage. Even had the Princess been heart-whole, the unbearable absurdity of such a speech could not have made a worse impression on her. She received his proposal with the dignity which it deserved, and treated him with such contempt that she was rid of his impertinences for some time afterwards.

## Chapter VII

### *A fortunate haven.*

MOST of the time at this charming Court was spent in the most delightful amusements. One day they all went a-hunting. The Queen was accompanied by the chief ladies of her suite dressed in riding habits, who either rode on horseback or in splendid barouches. The gentlemen of the Court, superbly mounted, followed them. Luzéide was adorable: her costume revealed fresh graces in her person, and the Prince could not take his eyes from her. He managed to find an opportunity in which to speak to her of his passion, and she replied in such a way as not to deprive him of all hope. The Djinn interrupted them several times and ruffled the sweet calm of the moments they were passing together. He was mounted on a fine horse, which he rode extremely badly; and to show that he knew all about everything, he talked hound, stag and wild boar with an enthusiasm which at any other moment would have amused the Princess; but she was more interested in what Angola had to say, and nothing could compensate her for missing it.

When they arrived at the meet, the Djinn, carried away by his eagerness for the chase, delivered them from his unwelcome presence. The

Prince also was obliged to leave Luzéide for the sake of appearances: he met Almaïr, and together they galloped off into the wood.

‘How is your affair with the Princess going?’ asked Almaïr. ‘Have you broken the ice yet and got through the preliminary stages?’

‘The Princess,’ answered Angola, ‘suffers me to speak to her of my passion, but she has not yet given any sign of her own: she is extremely demure about it, and I have tried in vain to extract a confession of her feelings from her.’

‘You seem very hard to satisfy,’ replied Almaïr; ‘a woman who suffers the confession of your own feelings without becoming annoyed, and who lets you declare them over and over again, is not very far, it seems to me, from returning them, and without conceit I think you can look forward to your moment of triumph. It is true that you would have got on much faster with Clénire. I had a conversation with her about you the other day, and I suspect her of having a distinct liking for you: she hinted enough to justify my conjectures; unless I am much mistaken, you would have no very formidable obstacles to surmount if a favourable opportunity occurred. After all, little infidelities of that sort need cause you no qualms, and do not in the least interfere with your principal affair

being with Luzéide. By the way, is Clénire here to-day?’

‘I do not remember having seen her,’ said Angola.

‘To be sure,’ went on Almaïr, ‘she has not been at Court for some days. I am much mistaken if this retirement on her part does not betoken some mystery which it should not be impossible to unveil.’

The conversation was interrupted by a stag dashing past them, followed by the hounds and by the greater part of the field. The Prince and Almaïr joined them and plunged into the forest. They had been following eagerly for some time when Angola, wrapped in his reverie, took a side track which separated him from the rest of the hunt. He went on for some time without noticing his mistake, and when he did notice it he found he had lost his way. He took the first path he came across, at a venture, and just as night was falling he came upon a very pretty house. He approached it with the intention of asking his way and, seeing a doorway in the garden wall, dismounted, tethered his horse to a tree and made his way through a thicket, which opened out into a beautifully kept garden divided by two fine fountains ornamented with statues. The path which he



followed led him to a summer-house in the corner of the garden in the middle of a dense plantation of hornbeams which shaded it from the heat of the sun. Its roof was shaped like that of a pagoda, and it had French windows on every side but one. Angola was approaching it without any precautions when, looking towards it, he thought he caught some movement. He crept along by the hornbeams, and going close up to the windows he saw that a woman was taking her bath in this delightful spot. Her back was towards him, so he could not see her face; but this fact was amply compensated for by the beauties that met his gaze. Every movement that she made discovered fresh ones to him, and for some time he remained still, enjoying the sight of such an attractive object. He began to experience the desires inseparable from his age, which completely mastered him. Urged on by the opportunity, he forgot everything, and could only think of how he could enjoy the beauties which were offered to his gaze.

The lady rose to leave the bath, and completed the Prince's undoing by revealing the charms which up till then had been hidden beneath the water. In leaving the bath she turned round and, seeing the Prince through the windows, she uttered a scream and hastily made for an alcove

containing a little bed in a recess. What was the Prince's surprise when he recognized in the lady the same Clénire of whom Almaïr had been speaking to him and whose absence had so aroused their curiosity! He hurriedly bent his footsteps in the direction of the door of the summer-house, and entered it, asking pardon for his indiscretion and resolving to commit even greater ones.

She was still almost completely disrobed, and the haste with which she tried to put herself into a more modest state only served to defeat her object and to allow the Prince to gaze on charms so lovely as to be indescribable. She recognized him at once, but that only added to her confusion.

'I do not know,' she said, 'what object brings you here; but I am deeply vexed by your lack of discretion.'

'Chance alone has led me here,' replied the Prince, 'and what thanks must I not render to it! Do not grudge me, madam,' he pursued, drawing nearer to her, 'such a precious boon; what mortal man could be so blind to his own happiness as to refuse to admire those adorable charms which even the gods themselves might envy?'

'Have done with such praises, which embarrass me,' said Clénire in confusion. 'I blush to think

that you should be in a position to say such things to me, and besides, I am convinced that you say them to so many different people that they are quite lacking in any sincerity.'

'Do yourself more justice, madam,' said the Prince, 'and believe me when I tell you that you make much too strong an impression to necessitate any fictitious ardour: my own is beyond description,' he went on, throwing himself at her feet and addressing her in that Court phraseology with which people have agreed mutually to deceive each other.

The keenness of his desires, the excellence of the opportunity, the charms revealed to his gaze, all gave his transports a character of true passion which, though it did not come from the heart, certainly appeared to do so. Clénire, who was already far from indifferent to him, began to share his emotion. The waning daylight made Angola more enterprising, and made it less necessary for Clénire to blush, which is always something removed from the embarrassment of such occasions. The situation was convenient and voluptuous; the Prince skilfully furthered his aims. He stole a kiss: she scolded him and he craved her pardon for his fault, only to commit a worse one a moment later, and the Prince, carried away by his

passion, basked in happiness to his heart's content.

The most touching beauties were abandoned to his caresses. Clénire still resisted him, but it was a pliant resistance which only added to his delight. Finally, she yielded to love and to a loved lover. Lucky Angola! Overwhelmed by happiness, he could no longer do anything but kiss and hug her fiercely. The beauties before him seemed each to be deserving of some special act of homage. Again he clasped her to him, and his soul tried to weave itself into hers. Clénire shared this voluptuous disorder: more charmed with one another every moment, they never wearied of giving each other stronger and stronger proofs of it, and they only left that charming spot to retire to Clénire's house, where she invited him to remain until the following day. They had supper together and behaved with the decorum necessary to deceive the lackeys who served them. After their meal they repaired to a charming room, in which everything seemed to invite them to love. Angola began to renew his caresses, and after that slight resistance with which a woman of the world must never dispense, Clénire let herself be led towards a dark alcove, into which the most exquisite pleasure followed her. The Prince held her in his arms: it would

have needed less than that to make her succumb, and many a woman has yielded without nearly such good reasons for her fall. Angola knew how to take advantage of the moment: nor did he disappoint Clénire; their time was so well spent that they had none either for reflection or for remorse. During one of those moments, when even the deepest love is forced to pause to take breath, Clénire admitted to the Prince that she had felt drawn towards him when she first saw him; but that, when she saw that his whole thoughts were occupied with Luzéide, she had tried to fight down her inclination, until at last, concluding from the difficulty she found in doing so that absence was the only remedy from which she could expect solace, she had decided some days before to retire to her house in the country to fortify her resolutions.

‘You have come to destroy them altogether,’ she said to the Prince with a charming languor, ‘and I ought to be very angry with you for disturbing the peace which I was beginning to enjoy.’

The Prince, charmed by such a flattering confession, took it as a hint that he had contracted a fresh debt to her, and proceeded to pay it so scrupulously that she could not fail to be satisfied.

At last, after the most delightful night, they left each other with protests of mutual affection which neither of them took in the least seriously.

The Prince then mounted his horse and returned to the capital.



## Chapter VIII

*Necessary, if dull.*

ANGOLA, after spending a few moments in his own apartments to repair the disorder caused by the activities of the previous night, hastened to Court for fear that his prolonged absence might give rise to spiteful comments. Several people who had been at the hunt had noticed his sudden disappearance, and he encountered a certain amount of chaff, which he answered so naturally that it gradually ceased; but he could not conceal the true state of affairs from Almaïr.

‘Will you allow me,’ he said to Angola, drawing him to one side, ‘to carry further my conjectures as to the circumstances in which you lost your way? It does not appear natural to me that you should have lost it for such a long time, except by pre-arrangement. I am quite prepared to believe that you are on a better footing with Luzéide than you would have me think, and that this sudden disappearance covered a clandestine meeting which I am sure you turned to your own advantage.’

‘I only wish,’ said Angola in confusion, ‘that your conjectures were right; I adore Luzéide, and this adventure which you imagine to have been arranged with her help really fills me with remorse and

now seems a most wicked transgression on my part.'

'Explain yourself more clearly,' said Almaïr; 'I am completely bewildered, and I confess frankly that my conjectures have been quite wrong.'

'Then listen, and I will tell you all about my wanderings and my misdeeds,' said the Prince. 'I got separated from the rest of the hunt, and chance led me to a country house, where I found a lady all alone taking a bath. And what a lovely lady too! But the most singular part about it was that she was the same Clénire whose disappearance had so surprised you.'

'What was I to do?' said the Prince, covered with shame. 'The situation was a delicate one, she loved me and admitted that she had fled from me, and I did not feel strong enough to follow such an excellent example; before my eyes were displayed the beauties that would not have left even the gods unmoved: my hopes of possessing them were not ridiculed, so I yielded to such a powerful fantasy, and we spent the night in a whirl of pleasures to which I ought not to give the name, whilst the remorse which is gnawing at me makes me regard them as a bitter insult to Luzéide, who is sufficiently revenged by my repentance.'

'I must admit,' said Almaïr, 'that the distraught way in which you relate such an agreeable adven-

ture seems strange to me. Why! Chance has been kind enough to procure you the favours of a charming lady who is idolized by the entire Court, and you contrive to relate an incident that should cover you with glory in the most doleful voice, only in order that you may exhibit an absurd constancy which is quite intolerable in persons of good breeding. I really do not understand you: your character is a mixture of the intelligence of a courtier and of the most trivial notions, which form a very queer contrast. Whence have you gathered the idea, pray, that persons of quality are so particular? How can you imagine that the admirable Luzéide, whom I suppose to be made much like other women, should wish, in picking a silly quarrel with you on such a minor matter, to put herself in the position of not daring to do the same thing herself, a privilege which I do not suppose she wishes to forgo any more than any other lady does? But speaking of that, the Djinn Makis is becoming extremely importunate: he is urging his suit with so much ardour that she is terrified; and the most dangerous part about it is that he talks of marriage, and such an alliance might easily dazzle the Queen and decide her in his favour. You can well imagine how the thought of such a union frightens the unfortunate Luzéide. The

appearance and behaviour of such an uncommon man is of very little account; and if this marriage is made to take place, I can see a very unhappy and gloomy future before her.'

'They will have to kill me first,' said Angola, 'for, my dear Almaïr, I see that I must tell you what I intend to do. The impression that Luzéide has made on my heart is quite different from that created by any of the women to whom I have hitherto attached myself. I love her character and her virtues, and with the consent of the Queen I have decided to link our fates together.'

'Although I am vexed at seeing you at your age take up an attitude for which one is frequently sorry afterwards,' said Almaïr, 'and one which makes one behave very foolishly, I cannot refuse to give you my advice on an occasion of such importance for you. In the first place, it is no use being combative and employing violence towards a man who, apart from being much too wise to lay himself open to it, has an immense power which he would not scruple to use to punish you in whatever way his anger dictated; and the least that could befall you would be to be enchanted for a thousand years until a knight errant born in the empty brain of some romancer came to deliver you by splitting open both him and all the other

monsters who would be guarding you. It would be unpleasant to have to rely for your deliverance on anything so extravagant: it is much better to take a wiser and less dangerous course. Makis, who is always inventing new ways of gaining the Princess's affection, is shortly giving a masked ball, at which the Queen, Luzéide and the Court ladies will most certainly be present. It will be easy to find out how they are to be disguised; and though I do not think that a lover's eyes require any aid in this direction, you will by this means recognize Luzéide, and you can take advantage of the liberty of the ball, and the inclination she has for you, to explain your intentions to her and to take the proper precautions, with her help, to make them succeed. In the meantime, I will impress the moral and physical defects of the Djinn on the Queen; I will make her realize how unhappy Luzéide would be if such a sacrifice were insisted on for her, and I will lead her imperceptibly to realize how much more suitable a union with yourself would be. I will carefully sound her inclinations, and on them we will base the measures that we have to take to ensure success.'

'Nothing could be better conceived,' answered Angola, 'and I have great hopes from the soundness of your plan. I will rely on your shrewdness

as regards Scintilla, and I will leave nothing undone to make sure of Luzéide's heart and to strengthen her determination.'

The Prince spent the following days in seeking out every possible opportunity of talking to the Princess, but, as she was continuously shadowed by the Djinn, he could hardly find time to say more than a few disconnected words to her, to which she replied by looks of encouragement. It is true that he saw in her eyes a note of sadness which seemed to be caused by the restraint imposed on her, and this consoled him somewhat for his unhappiness, because she seemed to be sharing it. The Djinn, emboldened by his power, was continually boasting of his love as of something of which Luzéide should be extremely proud, and the whole Court, who knew how preposterous he was, sighed at the thought of the fate that awaited the Princess in such an incongruous union. Scintilla was not blind about Makis, and none of his shortcomings escaped her notice; but the greatness of the Djinn's power, the fact that he would make Luzéide immortal, and the desire to be reconciled to the Fairy Malison by this alliance, inclined her in his favour and made her close her eyes to all the facts which might have prejudiced her against him.



## Chapter IX

### *An old-time ball; force of habit.*

AT last the day of the ball arrived, and all the young people of the Court, of both sexes, strove to outdo one another in splendour. The Djinn, with the object of pleasing Luzéide and of impressing her with his importance, had carried sumptuousness to the highest pitch. The façade of his Palace was lit up and decorated with huge lamps and fire-baskets. He had given the strictest orders to ensure that everything should proceed smoothly; notwithstanding this (and it would be very surprising if such a thing happened to-day), it was only with the very greatest difficulty that the guests could get to the door at all. The ball stewards, whose duty it was to keep order and to prevent any tumult, were all drunk, and added to the uproar instead of putting a stop to it. A large number of respectable people were turned from the door, and at the same time all the dregs of the populace were admitted. The refreshments, which had cost an immense sum, and the most exquisite wines in Asia, became the prey of slaves and other of people of that kind, whilst the distinguished guests for whom they were apparently provided could get nothing at all. Such a disorderly scene

would appear impossible to-day, when all feasts of this sort are carried through with the greatest decorum by the excellent foresight of those who are charged with the arrangements; but in those days things were not the same, and all that was required of such people was that they should have an imposing exterior. As for capacity to carry out their duties, they were never expected to exhibit any proof of that.

Apart from this, the ball was exactly what it should be to please a fashionable gathering. People could hardly move and, as there is nothing so wretched as dancing at a ball, and nothing so absurd as to go there with that intention, they got just what they wanted, there being scarcely room to breathe. Besides, the place itself was magnificent: it consisted of a series of large rooms superbly furnished, some of which were set aside for every kind of game by which to ruin oneself, and to which people devoted themselves in those days with a passion which was a disgrace to humanity. The fearful rage of those who lost, and the insensate joy of those who were lucky, formed an instructive picture which put sensible people on their guard against such dangerous distractions.

The ball-rooms were filled with a vast crowd of magnificently attired masked people of both sexes,

who presented the most splendid and brilliantly coloured spectacle. Angola and Almaïr arrived, as people of fashion should, two hours after midnight. They found it very difficult to push their way through, but at last, after endless trouble, they reached a room where the company was a little more select. They entered and approached a group of masked people, amongst whom they seemed to recognize the Queen and Luzéide, who were dancing the Dunkirk quadrille. Angola knew how Luzéide would be dressed. He had been told that she would be in white with a network of gold. He placed himself behind a lady in the quadrille dressed in this way, and talked a great deal of nonsense to her in that delightful falsetto voice which is kept specially for masked balls, and of which he was a master. She answered in the same vein, teased him a good deal, decided that he was unbearable, complained of his extreme foolishness, lifted the fringe of his mask several times, asked him some of those questions which one asks every one, recognized him, pretended not to, feigned to be puzzled and extremely bored with him and his conversation, and after the quadrille drew him on one side to scold him for his persecutions of her, quite determined in her heart to open the way to much more considerable ones.

They retired together into a corner, and Angola, convinced that it was indeed Luzéide, assured her that he knew her and begged her to unmask. He swore to her that his heart could not have deceived him, and added the most tender protestations of love that he could think of. The masked lady received them with a coldness that surprised him. He redoubled his pleading for her to unmask; but what was his surprise when, yielding to his importunities, she undid her mask and revealed not the features of Luzéide, but those of Clénire, who was very far from his thoughts! For a moment he was dumbfounded; but he was too much a man of the world and, above all, too tactful not to repair his fault at once.

‘Ungrateful wretch!’ she said to him, treating him to a look of mingled rage and passion, ‘is this the reward of all my kindness? And was it not enough to betray me so basely that you must add the cruel pleasure of compelling me to witness your perfidy?’

She rose abruptly and was about to leave him when Angola, who had had time to recover himself, broke into such a hearty laugh that she imagined him to be insulting her afresh. She was becoming more and more furious, when the Prince stopped her with a knowing smile:

‘Confess that I have made you pay dearly for the trouble you gave me to get you to unmask,’ he said. ‘I knew you at once, and in order to be revenged for your obstinacy, I thought I would pretend to take you for Luzéide, to whom I have just been speaking and whom I left in another room. Apart from everything else, I am delighted to have played this trick on you, because it has served to show me how keenly you would feel my loss, and the satisfaction this gives me prevents me from repenting for any sorrow it may have caused you.’

‘How well you know my weakness,’ replied Clénire, ‘and how easy it is for you to deceive a heart that is only too anxious to believe in your innocence.’

‘But what an idea!’ cried Angola. ‘How do you get such notions into your head? I really do love you very much; if you do not believe my words,’ he continued, coming closer to her, ‘you must believe my extreme passion, which I am dying to share with you.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Clénire, ‘you only boast of it because the place and our situation prevent me from confirming it, and in any case I imagine that Luzéide is the only one who could really flatter herself that she could excite it.’

How surprising are the effects of vanity and the excesses to which it leads the young! It is quite certain that Angola adored Luzéide, and no longer had for Clénire any feeling but that of the languid affection that we have for a woman who has lavished her choicest favours upon us and with whom we have never quarrelled. Clénire's speech, however, seemed to him to be a cruel and unbearable taunt which made him forget his remorse and his vows. He knew that he possessed excellent arguments for convincing her, and he put them forward only sufficiently disguised to soften their blinding brilliance whilst detracting nothing from their strength. It would have been impossible to derive any mutual benefit from them, and in the absence of any such possibility he prevailed sufficiently on Clénire's tenderness to persuade her personally to convince herself of the state of affairs. It was impossible for her to ignore such palpable arguments, and she began to pay attention to them in a sort of listless compliance. She could no longer pretend to doubt such well authenticated evidence. Presently an impulse of generosity and the desire of proving her disinterestedness to Angola compelled her to continue her good offices. She even, in an excess of delicate feeling, began to be curious to see what it



was all leading to. The Prince did not try her patience too high: his arguments were excellent, and the presence of Clénire added to their ardour. Soon they began to occupy her whole attention, and finally obliged her to yield to their force, bitterly regretting that she could not meet them by equally convincing ones.

The Prince expressed his gratitude to her in the warmest manner. He could not sufficiently praise the soundness and unselfishness that she had shown in the discussion of their interests. He spent a little more time with her in order to compose himself, and then they rose and mingled with the crowd again, Clénire being almost persuaded that the Prince loved her after all; the Prince, however, full of remorse for the past and of anxiety for the future, continued his search for Luzéide. He soon found her: she was unmasked, and was dancing a minuet with the Djinn. Angola was charmed with her grace and the perfection of her steps. Although they were playing the *Cupis* minuet, she was never out of time, and performed the *Marcel* step with extraordinary accuracy. A white domino with a network of gold, her hair dressed to match, exquisitely curled and studded with diamonds, and a faultless taste in all the rest of her appointments, showed off her beauty to perfection. As for

the Djinn, he was completely put in the shade by her. The Prince waited impatiently for an opportunity of dancing with her, and when it came he asked that the *Lavau* minuet should be played, and they danced it so well that they drew forth the applause of the whole assembly. When they had finished, the Princess took his arm to walk round the room, and the Prince took advantage of this to say what was in his mind.

‘How dearly, madam,’ he said to her in a low voice, ‘do I have to pay for the sweet moments I pass with you, and with what bitter regrets are they always followed! I have heard of the Djinn’s intentions, and I am in despair lest they should succeed.’

‘They are very far from being successful,’ said Luzéide, ‘and his odious character is perhaps not the greatest obstacle he will encounter in his suit.’

‘How lucky he is,’ pursued Angola, ‘to be able to profess his love openly, whilst I, forced to preserve a pitiless silence, languish without daring to harbour the faintest hope!’

‘Do not envy his position,’ said the Princess, ‘for I should hate you if you were in it, and I feel that such a sentiment would be very difficult for me where you are concerned.’

Talking in this strain they wandered, without

realizing where they were going, into a deserted room. They replaced their masks in order to be more untrammelled, and, thinking they were not observed, continued their conversation in their natural voices, discarding the customary falsetto of the ball.

‘You say that you would find it difficult to hate me,’ said Angola, continuing their conversation. ‘Ah, madam! the warmth of my sentiments deserves something more than that: nothing but love can repay a passion as great as mine, but you pride yourself on a relentless indifference which puts the finishing touch upon my misery.’

‘As a punishment,’ said Luzéide, ‘you deserve to be allowed to believe that.’

‘Your heart must be quite free, since you are still mistress of your decisions,’ replied Angola; ‘mine is in a very different state. I adore you, I see you slipping from me without being able to prevent it, and I can do nothing to deserve your love: what a combination of woes! How can I fail to bow beneath them?’

With these words, the Prince’s tears began to fall silently: they were too heartfelt and too real not to have an effect upon her.

‘Why do you give way to such despair?’ said Luzéide distractedly. ‘The inclinations of my

heart are only too strong in your favour, and perhaps I ought to resist them more: prove yourself worthy of my preference, and have no fear of the Djinn's rivalry, as even the most hideous fate would seem to me preferable to a union with him.'

'Will you, then,' said the Prince, 'allow me to approach the Queen on the question of our marriage, which is the subject of all my thoughts and hopes, and may I hope that until my efforts in this direction have succeeded, you will pay heed to the inclination that favours me and will resist all the Djinn's importunities?'

'I hate him as much as I am attracted to you,' said Luzéide, offering him her hand. 'I should prefer death to such a dreadful fate, and I will belong to you or to no one.'

The Prince, greatly moved by such a delightful promise, seized her hand and kissed it with the most ardent affection: not a very great favour to be accorded, you will say, but one which in his eyes was worth more than all those he had ever obtained from other women. The Princess, although carried away by her fondness for him, resisted with a modesty that only made the favour seem a greater one. She withdrew gently from his tender caresses, and they returned to the ball-room

quite unsuspecting the terrible calamity that was hanging over them.

So entirely absorbed were they in their enthralling conversation that they had not noticed that they were being overheard by a masked man in a black domino, who, sitting apart in a corner and pretending to be asleep, had not lost one word of their conversation: it was the terrible Djinn himself. He had followed them when they were in the ball-room, and the first words of their conversation had interested him sufficiently to make him want to hear the rest of it.

It was with the greatest difficulty that he avoided giving vent to his rage: and if he controlled himself sufficiently to do so, it was only by forming a barbarous plan which he put into immediate execution. The ball was nearly over, the candles were guttering, and the musicians, either drunk or asleep, had let their instruments fall from their hands. Most of the guests had dispersed, and those who remained had unmasked. Streaks of red and white paint ran down the faces of the dancers, revealing their haggard, loose and pimpled skins in a disgusting exhibition of emaciated coquetry. They were beginning to talk of onion soup and pickled capons when the Queen and the Princess prepared to take their leave. The

ladies, before parting, paid each other a few compliments as false as they were insipid, mutually praising their costumes and their beauty, and inwardly thinking each other detestable all the time.

At last, after the wretched formalities proper to the occasion had been observed, the Queen led the way to the door, leaning on Angola's arm. The Djinn, who was waiting for this moment to carry out his plan, offered his hand to Luzéide. A grey coach whose attendants wore no livery appeared, into which she stepped unsuspectingly; the coach drove off rapidly, and was at the gates of the town before she realized her danger and tried to scream. But the Djinn touched her with his wand, threw her into a trance and then, transferring her to his chariot, disappeared with her into the air.



## Chapter X

*Which leads up to important events.*

THE news of Luzéide's abduction spread rapidly through the Court, and it was not long before it came to Angola's ears. At first no one knew whom to suspect: but the Djinn's absence soon caused suspicion to centre on him. The Prince, in a passion of rage, fled to Luzéide's apartments and found all her servants in a state of distraction. Not being able to get any enlightenment out of them, he repaired to Makis's Palace. All he could discover there was that the Djinn had gone off without confiding his destination to anyone. In the depths of despair, and not knowing where to turn for help, Angola went to the Palace. There he found that every one had heard of the awful disaster. People were beginning to suspect the Djinn of having had a hand in it, and a hundred different theories were put forward, none of which satisfied the Prince's impatience. He had himself announced to the Queen, and throwing himself on his knees, he said to her with all the outward signs of the most bitter sorrow:

'Luzéide has been abducted, madam, under your very eyes, and at your Court the wicked Djinn has committed the most atrocious crime;

will you let him go unpunished, and shall it be said that this unhappy Princess has sought your protection in vain?’

‘I am fully aware,’ said the Queen, ‘of the depth of the Djinn’s perfidy, and I shall certainly give Luzéide the help which she has a right to expect from my friendship. But you seem to take an unusual amount of interest in her misfortunes, and you make me suspect things to which hitherto I have tried to close my eyes.’

‘I can gain nothing by trying to conceal the truth from you any more,’ said Angola. ‘I adore the Princess, and my love emboldens me to reveal to you my feelings, which need not merit your displeasure. I wish to make her my wife; and you know that I could not aspire to the same heights with you. Within the limits of choice which my rank imposes upon me, I have followed the dictates of my heart. I was hoping to make certain of my happiness by winning your approval; you may imagine, therefore, my despair and the pitiful position in which I am placed. You cannot refuse me your help,’ he went on, embracing her knees and weeping, ‘nor can you witness the distraction of my heart without applying the remedies which lie within your power.’

‘Ah, heavens!’ cried the Queen. ‘So this is the

result of the cruel prophecies of Malison. You are plunging blindly into the misery past which I have tried to guide you. Ungrateful wretch!’ she went on, now thoroughly vexed, ‘the possession of my heart was not enough for you; and all the time I thought I was mistress of yours you thought only of deceiving me.’

‘Accuse rather my unlucky star,’ said Angola, ‘which made me renounce such an envious fate only to deliver myself up to an unhappy passion whose prospects are anything but cheerful. I cannot avert my destiny, so do not refuse your aid to two unfortunate lovers whose whole lives depend upon your support.’

‘You arouse my pity,’ said the Fairy; ‘and since nothing can turn you from your resolution, I will provide you with the means of delivering Luzéide from the Djinn’s hands, though perhaps in doing so I shall merely put the finishing touch upon your misfortunes. Go now and follow the road to China without once swerving aside. The axle of your carriage will break at a certain point, which is the place where you must alight. This is where the Djinn has taken Luzéide: so far his efforts to overcome her stubbornness have been unsuccessful.

‘Here,’ she went on, ‘is a bonbon box containing cachous and pastilles scented with saffron and

violets; you must distribute them carefully amongst the monsters who will bar your passage, and this will spare you the trouble of undertaking a series of fights, the issue of which would be, to say the least of it, uncertain. Have the box of your carriage filled with some good bottles of Brie wine, which you must leave carelessly with the guard at the gate. As for the lackeys and other servants whom you will find in the apartments, just let a few packs of cards and a few new popular songs fall about and you will avoid their attentions altogether. For the rest, if by any unforeseen accident you have need of my help, you have only to call me to your aid, but you must only do this in the very last extremity. Fate has ordained that I can only help you once: and if you have recourse to me in some trivial matter, I can assure you that you will render all my good will towards you useless, and will do the unfortunate Luzéide irreparable harm. Such an important reason will doubtless prevent you from lightly summoning my aid and putting me into the position of other fairies who only succour Princes to help them to do or say something foolish and to share in the resulting ridicule.'

After this speech the Queen embraced the Prince tenderly: he took leave of her, went home

to undress, got into his night coach, went to bed, drank a little broth and gave orders to start.

He had a pleasant journey. He slept without waking once, and was not too much jolted. In those days all the roads of the Kingdom were in admirable condition: the Queen's surveyors took a great deal of trouble about them and, as they were all very poor, one could not help admiring their honesty and unselfishness. Even the post-horses were good and the service excellent, a thing which it is difficult to believe. At length, after several days' travel, one afternoon a pretty little town came into view. The axle of his coach broke as they arrived at the gates of a large castle: he was careful to scold his footmen roundly for this; and having given orders for it to be repaired immediately, he tidied himself and sent for the steward to make some inquiries of him.

'My lord,' answered the steward, who had not failed to question the Prince's servants and learnt even more than he asked, 'this is one of the country houses of the powerful Djinn Makis. He is spending part of the fine weather in this town. He arrived some days ago with a young lady, who looked very unhappy; no one is allowed to approach her and, to prevent anyone attempting to do so, he has filled the courtyard of his castle with

griffons, ostriches, were-wolves and chimæras, who guard the doors. However, I am convinced that such precautions cannot be directed against any one of your exalted rank, and I think that if you have yourself announced you will be excellently received.'

He then proceeded to tell the Prince about all the Djinn's frolics. Angola got rid of him with some difficulty and made towards the castle.

On arriving at the door he asked if he could see the Djinn. The guard, who was half-drunk, answered that there was no one in; but a footman who was following him, having whispered his master's rank and shown the guard a few hidden bottles which he was carrying, he craved his pardon and began drinking at once, allowing the Prince to pass into the courtyard. On his way he met the various monsters of which he had been told. He carefully distributed the sweets, which they eagerly devoured, being especially pleased with the scented pastilles; for the rage for being in the fashion had even extended to them. He reached the living rooms by a magnificent staircase, and on reaching the lobby he met a crowd of lackeys, who stared rudely at him with their hats on their heads. He deftly dropped the playing cards and the latest popular songs, which were



immediately picked up, and so absorbed the attention of every one present that no one answered his questions. He could not find anyone who would trouble to announce him, and he was compelled to enter without ceremony. He passed through a long series of splendidly furnished rooms, hung with portraits of the Djinn's ancestors, who were considered to have been the greatest people of their time. Makis was very particular about the nobility of his origin, and made a point of parading it on every possible occasion. In this way the Prince reached the last room; and having made his way with some difficulty through several curtains hung one over the other, he entered it. Three or four dogs rushed up barking and jumping at him, but he went on round a huge screen, and on the other side of it he saw Luzéide lying on a sofa plunged in the deepest despair. She gave a cry of surprise and joy on seeing him.

‘What! You!’ she cried delightedly. ‘By what lucky chance have you managed to penetrate into my apartments without succumbing to the perils which guard the entrance?’

‘What dangers would I not have braved,’ said the Prince compassionately as he threw himself at her feet, ‘to preserve you from the tyranny of such a wretch! I will bathe his treachery in his blood,

and even his immense power cannot protect him from my fury.'

'All your bravery would be of no avail, dear Prince,' said Luzéide, 'and would only serve to increase our misfortunes. I have undergone the most cruel persecutions from the Djinn. His absence at last gives me a few moments of rest. He has gone to Djinnistan to an assembly which he is bound to attend, and has warned me to be ready to submit to his passion on his return; but even the most painful death will never make me break the faith which I have given you: you alone shall have my heart and my hand.'

'I will deliver you from all these anxieties,' said the Prince, 'for I have forced my way into your apartments, and overcome all obstacles with the help of Scintilla.'

He then told her how he had outmanœuvred the Djinn's monsters and his servants.

'The Queen,' he continued, 'is aware of our mutual feelings, and she will certainly give her consent to our union. Let us go, madam, at once: my carriage will be ready; we can pretend to take a stroll in the gardens and so escape the vigilance of your guards.'

During this conversation the Prince sat down on an armchair near Luzéide's bed, and in doing so

he unwittingly fell into a trap which the Djinn had laid. Not having much trust in the Princess or, indeed, in any woman, he had considered it advisable, before leaving her, to ensure her fidelity by a means powerful enough to banish all his suspicions. He had made a talisman whose effect was a very peculiar one. For this purpose he had used some new Odes, two volumes of the *Mercury of Gallantry*, and two Panegyrics; and by the necessary incantations he had endowed it with soporific qualities which should only take effect when the lover with the consent of his mistress desired to set a seal upon his happiness; a profound slumber would interrupt his caresses and would recur each time he attempted anything of the kind. The Prince sat on the talisman without knowing it, and immediately (such was the power of its components), although he was in the midst of a most passionate speech which he was addressing to Luzéide, he yawned thrice and his eyes grew heavy. The Princess attributed this to the fatigues of the journey. He repeated his entreaties to her to come away, till at length she consented, influenced by her love for him and by her intense fear of the Djinn. She came out in the plain dress she was wearing, and in slippers, only giving herself time to throw a little pink cape lined with sable over her shoulders.

They passed through the apartments. The lackeys and maids, engrossed in their games or their songs, did not trouble about them. They went down and walked for a short time in the gardens. Thence they entered the courtyard, and there, finding the same monsters with the same appetite as before, Angola distributed the remainder of his store of sweets, which were soon gobbled up. Indeed, the monsters would have devoured the whole of the Rue des Lombards had they been given the opportunity. The Prince gave them no time to recover and, finding the guards in their usual condition, that is to say, nearly dead drunk, they went out happily together. The Prince's carriage was mended, and was waiting for him at the gates of the town. They rejoined it by a roundabout road, and made off as fast as they could to Scintilla's Kingdom.

## Chapter XI

### *A fruitless wedding and vain expedients.*

THE PRINCE'S love, which was for once tinged with respect, prevented him from at once discovering the fatal spell which the talisman had cast over him. After a delightful journey, in which they showed each other all the signs of a real affection, they arrived at Scintilla's Court, where they were received with great rejoicing. The Fairy lavished endearments on them, though she could not give up the Prince without a certain regret. As it was impossible for her to keep him, the joy of witnessing such a fitting union made her play her part like a sensible woman. She put a great many questions to Luzéide about the persecutions to which she had been subjected by the Djinn, and spoke kindly to her about her attachment to the Prince, to which she gave her entire approval. Angola took advantage of the propitiousness of her mood to entreat her to advance their mutual happiness by joining them together by indissoluble bonds.

'I cannot oppose you in this,' said the Fairy, 'but I am afraid of some calamity occurring as a result of Malison's predictions. You have not yet reached the age fixed by Destiny for the end of

your misfortunes. I beg of you to wait, to calm your eagerness and not to enter into marriage under such unfavourable auspices.'

'What pleasure can you have,' said Angola, 'in making me unhappy again, and why should you place such faith in vague prophecies prompted more by anger than by a sure knowledge of the future?'

'Do not delay my happiness any more, madam,' he continued, 'and deign to fix the happy day that shall crown it.'

Scintilla could not resist so many entreaties, and gave orders for the wedding festivities to be prepared. She sent to get the consent of King Erzeb-Can and of Luzéide's father, which they both gave with pleasure, each delighted with the alliance they were contracting.

At last the happy day arrived on which the seal should be set on the joy of these two lovers. The Queen, the bride and bridegroom and the whole Court repaired to the temple, in the most splendid robes. They were married amid the acclamations of the whole people. It was noticed, however, that the Prince made a blot in signing his name, and that he gave Luzéide the ring with his left hand; but, although these omens were very forbidding, every one tried to forget them and only thought of



throwing themselves into the festivities due to the occasion. The Prince threw passionate glances in Luzéide's direction on the sly, and would have liked to have had a quarter of an hour's conversation with her alone during the day; but the customs of the country did not allow of disappearances of this sort, and he was compelled to wait impatiently until the evening allowed him to give rein to his feelings. He received Almaïr's congratulations on his marriage: they were more like condolences than congratulations, but Angola could not take offence at his chaff nor condemn a point of view that had so long been his own. He was, indeed, the first to jest about his changed condition and to confess his impatience.

In the evening there was a card party, and the Prince, who was usually extremely fond of cards, played with an absence of mind which Luzéide noticed and which plunged her into the same condition. He supped very lightly, contrary to his usual habit, a fact which did not escape the attention of the Court wits. The newly married pair were obliged to be present at the ball, and even to appear in fancy costume. Angola resisted this for a long time, and in the end insisted on going as a bat. In his opinion the ball-room was badly lit, the orchestra abominable, the minuets boring, the

quadrilles insipid, and all the costumes awkward and ill-fitting. One of the guests undertook, to amuse his Highness, to dance *The Bride*. The Prince, who dreaded anything that might prolong the evening, and who, moreover, could not remember having heard of this dance since he had been to Court, asked what it was; and when he heard, he would gladly have sent the guest to the Bastille to rehearse its steps.

At last midnight arrived, to the great relief both of himself and of the guests, who found him very dull, and they retired to their apartment to give themselves up to the consolations that awaited them. Angola and Luzéide were accompanied by the Queen and all the principal ladies and gentlemen of the Court, who plied them with the stupid jokes usual on these occasions, and which are enough to infuriate even the most stoical. The Prince could not contain his irritation, and was about to push them out bodily when Scintilla, perceiving his impatience, bade them good night and went out, followed by her Court.

Angola immediately dismissed the maids who were there to disrobe the Princess. He willingly undertook the task himself, and shot all the bolts to protect himself from any practical jokes that might be contemplated. At last, finding himself

free to devote himself to his love, he approached Luzéide eagerly and began to disrobe her with a haste much resented by her lace and ribbons, but which was more flattering to her vanity than any dainty carefulness would have been. Love and modesty vied with one another in the Princess's heart, but love was the stronger emotion and completely triumphed over the other, and she was soon in such a plight that she could no longer hide any part of her charms from him without revealing others.

At first his love showed itself in the most delicate caresses; and Luzéide, as though emboldened by the gloom, abandoned herself to them, and even returned them with ardour. A prey to desires that were new to her, she made but a very slight resistance and seemed to be awaiting enlightenment on many points which seemed strange enough to merit her curiosity. At length Angola tried to surmount the obstacle which he would have been very sorry not to have encountered; but at his first attempt a sudden numbness overcame his senses. He abandoned Luzéide, whom he was holding clasped in his arms, and lay beside her buried in the most profound silence.

The Princess was astounded at such an unexpected turn of events. It was in vain that she

told herself that it was the result of the fatigues of the day: she felt that there must be something extraordinary in such a rapid change. Although she knew very little about it, she felt that the Prince had exhibited a passion which was not at all compatible with fatigue or sleep; and without quite knowing to what his passion was leading, she imagined in a general way that if it was to be followed by rest, it should certainly have some use beforehand which, as far as she could see, it would well deserve. She even noticed that the Prince's sleep had not destroyed it altogether and that he had, as it were, rested on his laurels. She spent some time in weighing all these things in her mind and she had not arrived at any conclusion when Angola awoke.

At first he could not understand what had happened to him, and his surprise by no means diminished when he began to realize it. Without undue pride he knew that he had certain qualities which did not at all tally with an adventure of this sort. He could not make anything of it. Compelled at last to attribute the incident to the fatigues of the day and of the ball, he tried to make up for the time he had wasted so iniquitously. He was confident that this time it would all end happily. Roused by those charming preliminaries which

are perhaps more exciting than pleasure itself, he reached once more the obstacles he had not had time to surmount.

‘How happy I am,’ he exclaimed, ‘my dearest Princess, how I love . . .’

But the words died upon his lips, his strength failed him and he slid once more into the most profound slumber. Luzéide, astounded by this fresh accident and baffled of certain confused hopes which she had not yet ventured to analyse, had to summon up all her magnanimity to bear this terrible disappointment. For some time she remained in sad and gloomy thought. At last, afraid that his reiterated drowsiness was the symptom of some illness, she did violence to her modesty and woke the Prince.

‘Your condition makes me anxious, my dear Angola,’ she said, as he awoke; ‘your sleep does not seem natural; if I am not much mistaken, you yourself do not understand what has happened in such circumstances.’

‘Ah, my dear Princess!’ cried Angola. ‘The strength of my love ought to preserve me from such mischance. If it were the work of nature I could understand it, but I have nothing with which to reproach it. A cruel fate pursues us, and the obstacles separating us are beyond our strength to

cope with; but nothing can calm my ardour,' he went on, 'and I must make certain whether I have lost everything, and leave no stone unturned to grasp my happiness.'

He soon found himself again at the fatal point at which he failed before. The Princess, to fulfil her duties scrupulously, encouraged him in a way which at any other time he would have found insulting. But all to no purpose. Seized once more with his fateful drowsiness, he fell asleep on the laurels he had not yet gathered. Shortly afterwards he awoke to give way to his fury. Only too certain now of his misfortune, and completely at a loss to account for it, he sought in vain for the cause of his disaster and for some means of retrieving it. His past exploits came to his mind and increased the bitterness of his mortification.

'By what dreadful fate,' he cried, 'have I suffered this cruel change at the very time when I want to surpass myself? Oh, fatal marriage, over which the most passionate love should have watched, and which is haunted only by the Furies of Hell!'

His despair had reached such a pitch through the humiliation that comes with such adventures that the Princess was obliged to do her best to console him. Her good nature only sharpened



Angola's pangs. He was, however, too grateful to her not to try to deserve it. But the same failure attended all his efforts, and the entire night passed in vicissitudes of this kind.

Dawn found them plunged in the deepest depression. Luzéide, persuaded of the Prince's love and, indeed, convinced of it by certain points that spoke strongly in his favour, felt nothing but a tender pity for the misfortunes which he seemed to deserve so little; and the Prince, bewildered by an adventure which he compared to his past triumphs, required all his self-control not to break down under his sorrow.

When the hour arrived for them to rise, every one came in, and they were deluged with pointless pleasantries which the Prince received with a gloom declared by the Court wits to be the inevitable result of marriage. Luzéide's embarrassment, on the other hand, was considered quite natural and caused no surprise, and was greatly added to by a thousand eager questions which seemed to distress her all the more because she was not in a position to answer them. Almaïr came with the others to pay his court. As soon as the Prince saw him he called to him, and drawing him aside, said with rage and sorrow in his eyes:

‘You see me beside myself with exasperation over an incredible adventure.’

He then told him everything that had occurred on the previous night.

‘You know me,’ he continued, ‘and you know that in one direction my reputation is quite clearly established, and that I can hold my head as high as anyone where that is concerned. Could anything be more cruel than what has happened to me with a woman whom I adore and who is the last person I should have wished to fail?’

‘I am astounded at what you tell me,’ said Almaïr. ‘It is a certain consolation to know that you have nothing to reproach yourself with in other directions, but there are evilly disposed people at Court, and a drowsiness which might appear to be perfectly natural after three months of marriage might well destroy a man’s reputation as a lover in the present circumstances. It is quite beyond me, especially as you tell me that your honour is quite untarnished elsewhere.’

‘Oh, as to that,’ said the Prince, ‘my mind is quite easy, and I remember few occasions in my life where I could have promised myself greater triumph.’

‘Listen,’ said Almaïr; ‘unless I am much at fault, Makis has a hand in this. Go to the Queen

and let her advise you as to what to do. Do not waste time: things which are so important to one's honour can brook of no delay.'

The Prince, following his advice, immediately went to the Queen. He asked her for a private audience, and was about to tell her hesitatingly of his disgrace in as few words as possible, when she forestalled him:

'I know all your misfortunes,' she said to him; 'this morning I consulted my books to find out under what auspices your marriage took place and what the results would be; and thus I discovered the cruel fate which pursues you. The implacable Malison and the cruel Makis are the cause of your disaster, and I only know of one remedy; and this is it:

'In the happy country of Arabia there lives a Djinn named Moka: he possesses a mysterious potion which has the power to combat even the most obstinate drowsiness. He will undertake to cure you, provided you can stand the trials that will accompany that cure. The Princess must go with you so that you may be able to convince yourself of your cure before leaving the Palace. Go without delay, and count on my friendship. I hope shortly to see you in a much calmer mood.'

The Prince thanked her profusely for her kindness

and, after making a few inquiries about the journey, he returned to the Princess and got everything ready for their departure.

They set out on the same day and travelled as fast as they could. Every night Angola had further proofs of the cruelty of fate, and they arrived at last quite worn out with anxiety, and immensely relieved that their troubles were drawing to an end.

## Chapter XII

*The remedy is worse than the disease.*

THE town in which the Djinn Moka lived was a charming and well populated one. The use which the inhabitants made of his beneficial potion gave them a lively and sprightly air. It is true that only the Djinn possessed the power of giving it the secret property which was necessary to cure Angola's infirmity; but his subjects used it to dispel the sleep which they regarded as so much time stolen from pleasure. The town was full of places where this agreeable potion was sold, and it was a meeting place of all sorts and conditions of men. There were old ruined lords who passed their time in railing against the government and the ministers, and in regretting the good old times when true merit was more adequately rewarded. Here, again, one saw politicians who wanted to pacify Asia, and who were for ever discovering infallible methods for reconciling the interests of all the reigning Princes. With the utmost effrontery they spread apocryphal news which originated in their empty and disordered minds, and which in the end they even came to believe themselves. They placed islands in the middle of continents, the Ganges in Egypt, made armies fight when they

were not within a hundred leagues of each other and could never meet at all, and were ready to tear out one another's hair over imaginary quarrels which they ascribed to Princes who would certainly not have rewarded them for their zeal.

There were also quantities of unemployed abbés and magistrates, of whose past nothing remained but their characteristic uselessness, which they were very careful to preserve by a life that corresponded to their inclinations. There were discharged officers who had saved some remnants of their bodies from the ravages of war, but had hardly got enough out of it to cover them. They were spending the remainder of their lives in dragging their crutches about and existing on modest pensions, continuously railing against the people who had granted them.

Some of these places were frequented by people who considered themselves to be cultured, and who arrogated to themselves the right of pronouncing an opinion on everything new in Art and Literature. Unfortunately for them, the public seemed to make a point of reversing all their decisions, which did not, of course, prevent them from being all-important in their own circle. They possessed excellent lungs, and woe betide anyone who tried to argue with them. It is true



that they had the peculiar gift of being able to talk a great deal without saying anything; but, on the other hand, they bellowed their sophistries and paradoxes, shaking their fists at logic, and laid down the law about everything without considering any facts, and generally roused such a storm of academic discussion that people who were unfortunate enough to possess common sense fled incontinently from them.

At any other time the Prince would have been much amused by such a perfect example of the fantastic; but, entirely taken up with his own misfortune and his eagerness to remedy it, he had himself taken straight to the Palace of the Djinn, to whom in a few words he explained his predicament and proffered his request to be cured. Moka received him with mock seriousness, behind which lay a cunning smile.

‘I am afraid you are tired at present,’ he said, ‘and not in a condition to stand the cure. I advise you to go and rest, and to-morrow I will see what I can do.’

At the same time he had him shown into the magnificent apartment which had been placed at his disposal. A separate apartment had been prepared for the Princess, but they would not agree to this. It was useless to point out to them that

nothing was so unfashionable as for married persons to sleep together; that it was one of the worst signs of ill-breeding, especially when there was so little to be done. The Prince ignored this tactless reference to his misfortune, and refused absolutely to be separated from Luzéide. In the end they got their own way, and retired together.

In order to understand this true history properly, it is necessary to know that Moka was an intimate friend of the Djinn Makis, who had told him of his designs on Luzéide, of the part he had played in the Prince's misfortunes, and of his desire to profit by them. Moka gladly lent himself to these designs, and had little trouble in succeeding in his treachery.

Shortly after entering their apartment, the Prince and Luzéide retired to bed. The Djinn Makis, who was following all their movements, introduced himself invisibly into the room and hid himself in a clock. He saw the Princess being undressed, a sight which greatly increased his eagerness. Hardly had she gone to bed than, by his own unaided power, he placed himself beside her pillow, and from there he slid himself amongst the trellis of ribbon that held her nightgown together and awaited a favourable moment to carry out his infamous designs.

That evening the Prince was more alert than usual, and he spoke to the Princess in the most loving manner, to which she replied in the same spirit. He was so carried away by the moment that he imagined his trouble to be at an end.

‘What passion you arouse in me,’ he said, kissing her tenderly; ‘it is so ardent that I feel my hopes return. Deign to share my passion with me, dearest Princess,’ he continued, still more eagerly; ‘perhaps at last I shall overcome my cruel fate.’

At the same moment, urged on by his passion, he returned to the undertaking in which hitherto he had so lamentably failed.

‘Enough!’ cried Luzéide, almost vanquished; ‘have you forgotten our misfortunes and the fatal obstacles to our happiness?’

‘I flatter myself,’ said the Prince, and at the same time fell into a deep sleep . . .

‘. . . that I shall overcome them,’ immediately continued the Djinn, who, reassuming his body and his human feelings, naturally found himself in the Prince’s place and prepared to commit his horrible crime.

‘Yes, I am really quite confident about it,’ he continued excitedly in an assumed voice; ‘so I humbly offer you the testimony of my most ardent love.’

And so saying, he carried his criminal plans through to the bitter end. He had replaced the Prince so skilfully that Luzéide had no idea of the calamity that was befalling her, and gave utterance to a torrent of endearing words. The treacherous Djinn took full advantage of her mistake, and if happiness in crime is possible, he was undoubtedly happy. She innocently returned the caresses he lavished upon her. And so the adorable beauty of Luzéide became a traitor's prey, whilst the unfortunate Angola in his oblivion had no idea of the wrong that was being done to him. He awoke at last, and the Djinn deftly slid away and placed himself in a cupboard whence he could hear the conversation of the two lovers and watch the growth of the terrible suspicions that must necessarily follow on his crime. Only this cruel pleasure was wanted to complete his vengeance.

'Our misfortunes still continue,' said Angola, 'and my only hope now is in Moka.'

'We need never have taken this journey at all,' replied Luzéide; 'the tokens of love that you have just given me show me how useless it has been.'

'But how slight they are,' said Angola, 'compared with those that I am burning to give you!'

'I do not know,' said the Princess, 'what you have withheld from me, but the ecstasy which you

have shown me and which I have been sharing for some hours without respite is such that my imagination cannot picture anything greater.'

'I do not think that I deserve such cruel satire from you,' said the Prince, 'and I should never have thought that you would have held me responsible for faults which are but the cruelties of fate.'

'But you have amply atoned for them,' cried Luzéide, 'and it is impossible to refuse you a forgiveness which you have earned so well! I was dreading the slumber, which you managed to avoid; and the love that I showed you by abandoning myself utterly to you could never repay your own love. Let us leave, dear Prince, and forgo Moka's potion, which is quite useless to you now; in fact, I think that if you need anything it is something that shall have the opposite effect!'

'What on earth do you mean?' cried Angola in consternation. 'There is some horrible mystery here that is beyond me! You say, Luzéide, that you have tasted the delights of love and that I have shared them! In this very bed, the witness of my continued misfortunes! Explain yourself, in the name of the gods. I can only imagine that you have had a dream, and indeed a flattering one for me, and that it was so intensely vivid as to give

you an illusion of reality. As far as I am concerned I am certain that last night my love made me attempt what I have failed so often to do; that on the point of surmounting those obstacles which have always checked me I was again overcome by a deep sleep from which I have only now awoken.'

'What!' cried Luzéide, bursting into tears; 'you disown the transports which made me so happy! Was it not you on whom I lavished my most loving caresses and to whom I yielded my most precious possession, and who seemed tireless in insisting on fresh assurances of my love? Is it possible that another has gathered so rare a harvest, which had been kept for you by my love and by your rights? Dear Prince, do not distress me further by such dreadful doubts.'

'Luzéide,' said the Prince, 'there is something remarkable about all this; but it is easy to make certain, for a dream cannot leave the evidence that only belongs to reality.'

At the same time, with Luzéide's consent, he tried to ascertain whether any change had taken place in her. But, whether the trail of a celestial intelligence is different from that of man, or whether conjectures of this sort are always a little unsatisfactory, he could find nothing that



convinced him absolutely of the disaster that had befallen him. If anything could have increased his anxiety it was to find in Luzéide a certain compliance with things to which a few hours before she would scarcely have consented. He spent the remainder of the night in the most heartrending doubt, and at dawn the Djinn Makis, having enjoyed to the full his brutal gloating over their distress, went to tell Moka of the success of his treachery.

The hour of the interview with Moka having come, they were shown into his apartment. The Djinn had the mysterious potion brought to the Prince, and he took several doses of it; and in order that there should be no possible doubt about its efficacy, one of the Djinn's secretaries, who stammered badly, read to him two speeches delivered at the French Academy and three funeral orations. The Prince nearly succumbed once or twice, but the spell of the potion preserved him, and he merely yawned occasionally. Moka assured him that, as he had passed this test, he could henceforth be almost certain of never sleeping unless he wished to rest, and promised him that Luzéide would be the first to admit the efficacy of the remedy. He offered to let him try it in the Palace, and to entertain him there the following

night. Angola shuddered at this suggestion, but, concealing his anxiety and pretending to have urgent business at Scintilla's Court, he took leave of the Djinn and left him to give orders for their departure. Whilst passing through the apartments he met the Djinn Makis hand in hand with the Fairy Malison; he could not avoid giving them the greetings customary amongst fashionable people. They received them airily and added a few distorted quips in which he could trace a reference to the misfortunes he suspected. It was with the utmost difficulty that he curbed his fury at the sight of the Djinn and, though he had never before seen the Fairy Malison, he knew her at once by her appearance. She congratulated him on his marriage and added ironically that it was not her fault that all obstacles had been thus early overcome. Makis, on his part, addressed a few equivocal remarks to the Princess, to which she did not even deign to reply. Finally, Angola, unable to give rein to an abortive rage for which, after all, he had no definite grounds, being lost in a thousand conjectures which crossed and recrossed one another, took a curt farewell of them and retired with Luzéide to his own apartment. His most pressing need was to assure himself of his cure. And if the Princess did not show any very

great experience, at least she showed enough to increase his uneasiness. As to any other difficulties which might have reassured him, he had too much pride not to give himself the benefit of the doubt.

After some time devoted to their mutual affection they left, and in due course arrived at Scintilla's Court. She was overjoyed to see them and to hear that their troubles were at an end. The Prince, still gnawed by his misgivings, confided them to Almaïr, who, like a sensible man, though he guessed pretty clearly what was at the bottom of it all, treated the whole affair lightly and confined himself to calming the Prince's fears. The opinion he had of himself and Luzéide's extreme tenderness towards him gradually dispelled his gloomy thoughts, and their union became a calm and happy one. Apparently neither Angola nor Luzéide ever had any further inkling about their adventure, and thus the Prince's lot was a much happier one than that of many husbands who are obliged to pretend not to be aware of a much more distressing certainty.

In fact, we should never have learnt the truth had not Makis let it out in his old age whilst relating the interesting tale of his good fortunes. If the Fairy Scintilla, in her superior intelligence, discovered anything, she knew much too much

about the world to tell anyone. The Prince and Princess spent their youth happily at Scintilla's Court. Almaïr always remained in the greatest favour with the Prince, and perhaps he even made him fail now and then in his marriage vows, but of this history is silent. However that may be, their life together was a very happy one, and after the death of Erzeb-Can they succeeded to his Kingdom, governed their people wisely, and did many things worthy of record, which another pen than mine will doubtless undertake to preserve for posterity.

*The Story ends*

'THANK heavens we have got to the end of our story!' cried the Comtesse. 'It shows what foolish people authors are. You may have noticed that it is only in atrocious little stories like this that we are so badly treated. Really, an end should be put to this nuisance, once for all.'

'Why,' interrupted the Marquis, 'are you so bitter about them? They only speak of the faults that make you so dear to our eyes; personally, I am full of sympathy for them; and besides, virtue is such a wretched thing . . . And, now that I think

of it, we seem to get on very well together; supposing . . .’

‘That is quite enough, Marquis,’ replied the Comtesse. ‘I am never seduced by example. I am as surly as a bulldog, and I shall go out of my way to discredit this impertinent work. I shall say so much about it that my ridicule will kill it . . .’

‘I quite agree with you, madame,’ replied the Marquis. ‘Even if women cannot find anything to like in it, it will place such a heavy burden on us, that it will be to our interest to see that it does not become widely known. It is easy enough for these author gentlemen to provide such a run of good fortune from the security of their studies. If they were in our place . . . Really, it is quite unbearable and I myself am in such a state . . .’

*The Editor has not been able to get hold of the rest of this interesting conversation, and is deeply distressed that the public should be deprived of it.*

THE END

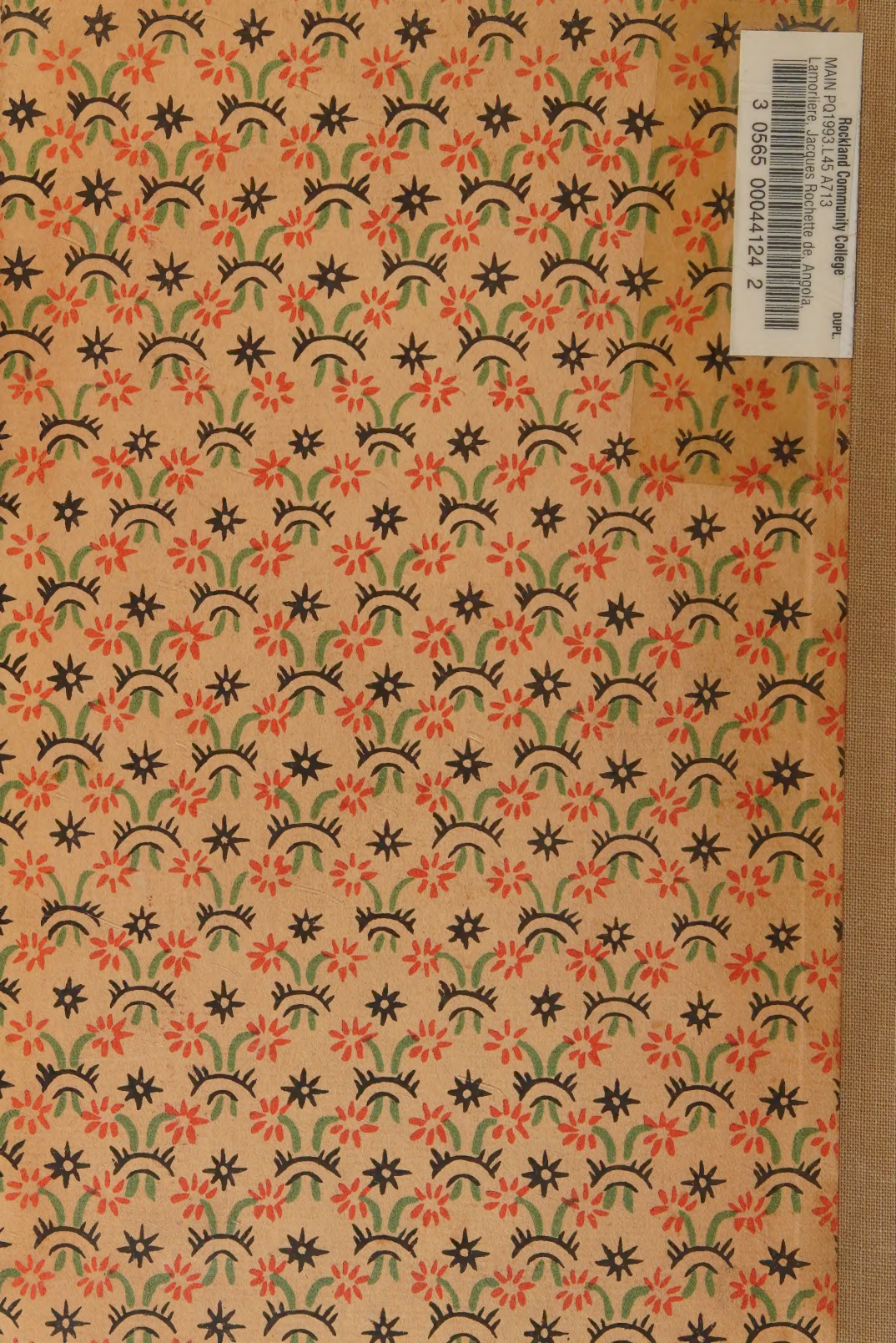






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